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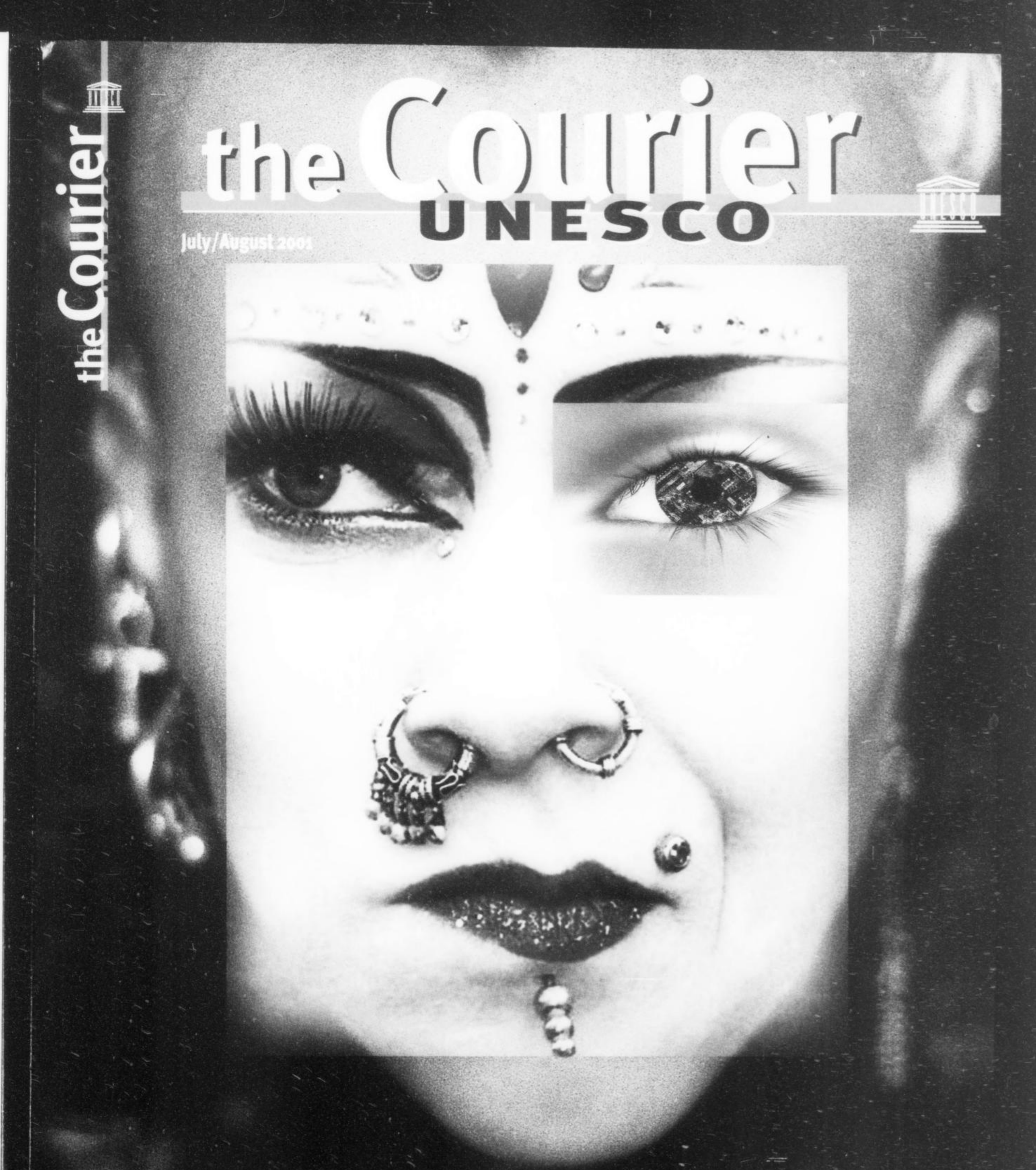

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Focus

Beauty and dreams of perfection...
The new body shop

The cultural corsets confining our views of the human body no longer fit in a world engulfed by Aids and global advertising. From the former freedom fighter in South Africa to the Tokyo fashion victim, individuals are struggling to redefine what it means to be a "real" man or woman. Each advance in the operating theatre brings us closer to the dream of physical transformation—the promise and curse of modernity. Aspiring beauty queens flock to Venezuela's cosmetic surgeons while Indian peasants sell their kidneys to make ends meet. Meanwhile, cyberpunks slip computer chips under their skin, anticipating the next leap in evolution.

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Threatened with death for his opposition to armed struggle, the Basque philosopher practices his own brand of "active pessimism."

IN THIS ISSUE

Mutation

Will the 21st century be the age of body mutations *ad infinitum*? By transgressing beauty codes and diverting medicine from its therapeutic ends, a new generation is writing on flesh the rules of a new game and shaking up all our assumptions about bodily norms (focus, pp. 20-59).

Protection

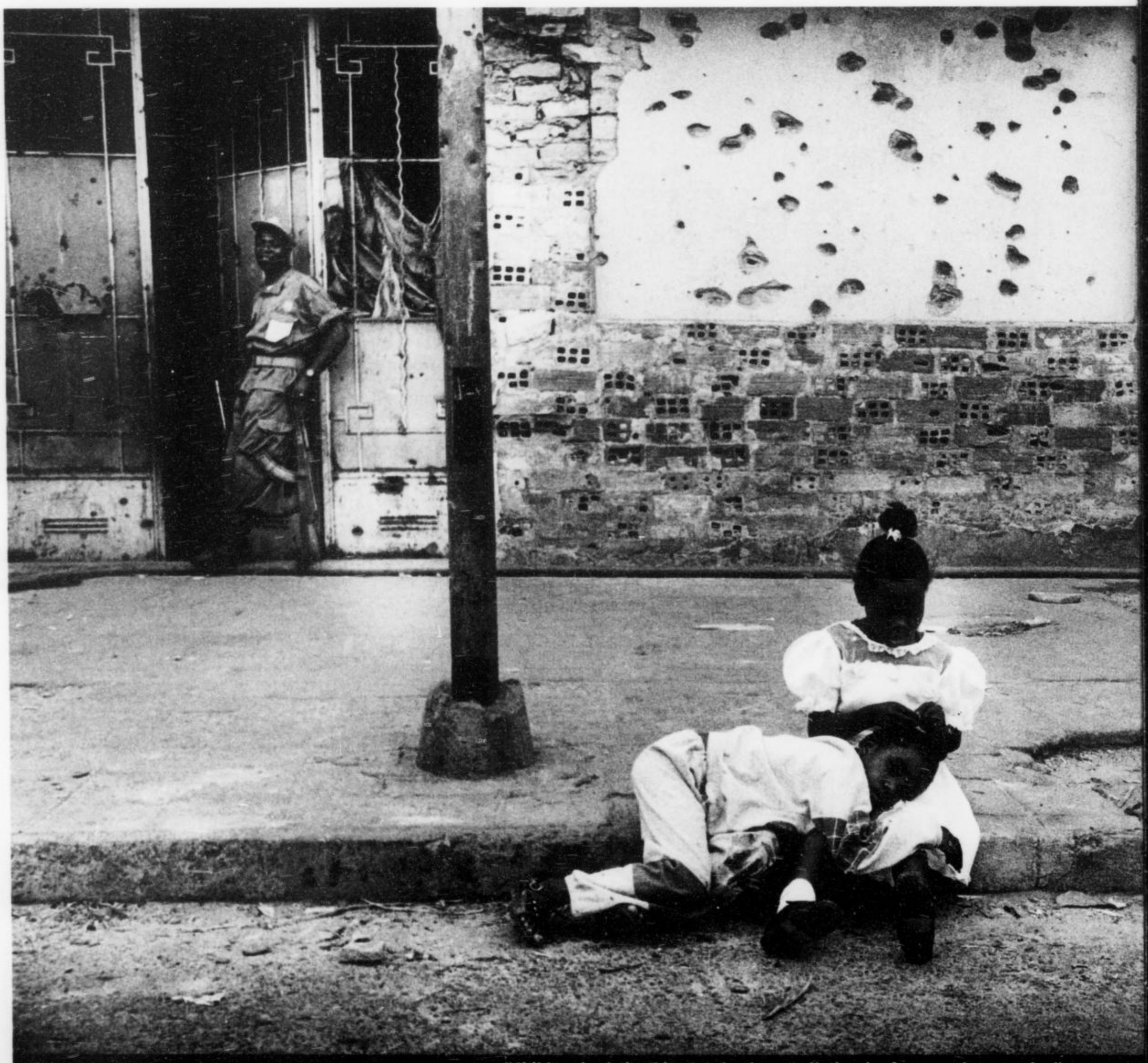
The notion that nature can only be protected in a virgin state is obsolete. Its inhabitants, in most cases indigenous people, are the rightful custodians of the land. But there is no miracle solution: as ecotourism in southern Africa goes to show, the record is mixed (pp. 12-15). Do crafts need the market to survive? An experience in India seems to prove the case, while a Laotian prince's vocation to protect gold-thread embroidery is something of a lone struggle (pp. 16-19). In Quebec, the arduous efforts to protect French through stringent language laws are now loosening up to make place for English and "allophone" tongues (pp. 64-66). And the laughter of children in the war-ravaged Angolan city of Kuito is keeping hope alight, for the young are the ones pushing "the world onwards to infinity" (pp. 4-10).

Minorities

Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater, of Basque origin, speaks out against those minorities who are "fragmenting humanity," driven by an "ethnic-totalitarian" ideology that is imposing violence in place of the rule of law (pp. 66-69). In Mexico, the uprising of a Zapatista minority has stirred the press from its age-old subservience. Elsewhere in Latin America, restoration of democracy and the technology revolution are pushing forward the same cause (pp. 66-69).

Signed articles express the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of UNESCO or those of the editors of *the UNESCO Courier*. Photo captions and headlines are written by *the UNESCO Courier* staff. The boundaries on maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UNESCO or the United Nations of the countries and territories concerned.

Kuito, a child's of war and inf



"Children in their white Sunday best walk the city from north to south..."

s map
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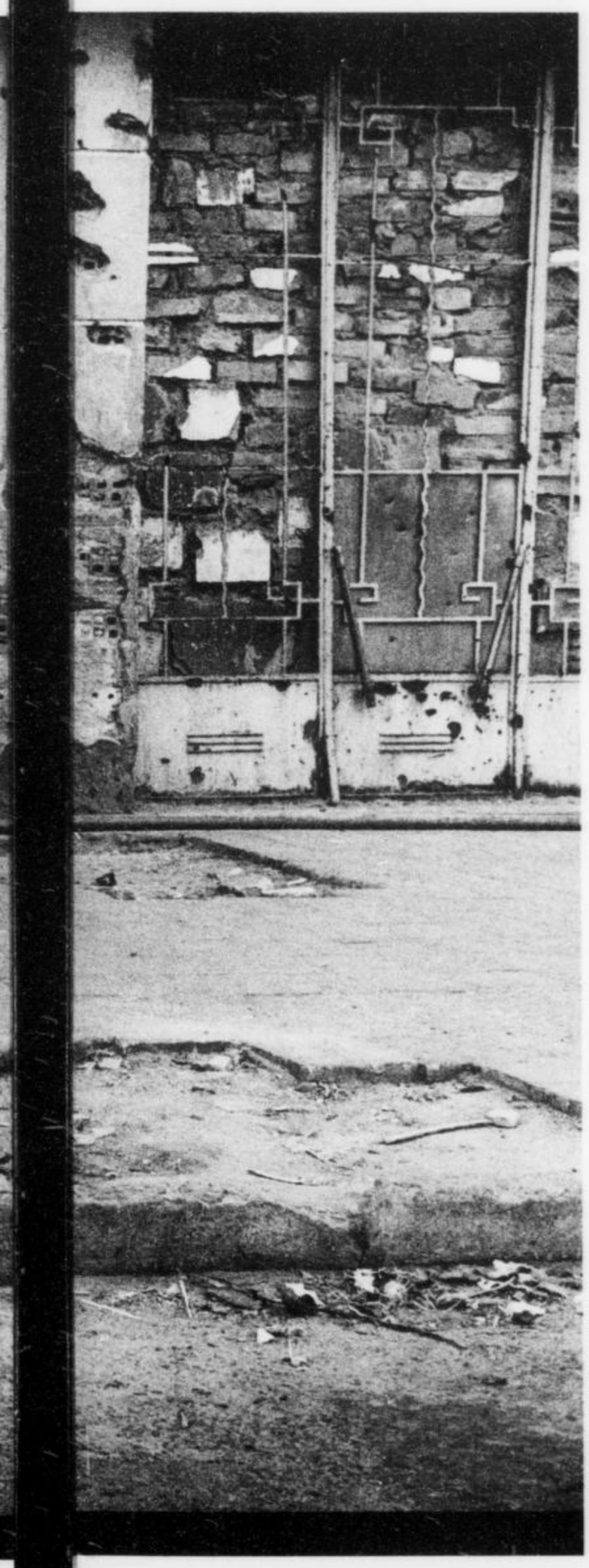
PHOTOS BY GUY TILLIM, TEXT BY ANA PAULA TAVARES

GUY TILLIM IS A FORMER ECONOMIST FROM SOUTH AFRICA;
ANA PAULA TAVARES IS AN ANGOLAN POET AND WRITER



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"Through something small, one can sometimes discover the great things of life; there is no need to explain, one simply has to look."
Drawing on the wisdom of her countryman and fellow writer Ondjaki, the Angolan poet Ana Paula Tavares reflects on the photos of children taken in the devastated town of Kuito

The children's days pass like light scattering on the wings of a bird. Small waves buoy them along, their fragile bones, their vast souls opened wide towards the sky.

A sense of eternity lies in each window turned toward the light, the sun glides in through blankets of pollen settling on the ground. Children move forth as if the world under their little feet was a theatre stage. Far in the distance, the rumours of fountains can still be heard.

Children's laughter fills the silence, as if the soul of the rain had risen and was beckoning the rivers to return and tempt wheat, maize and manioc from the earth. Every wall is a mountain, and the higher one climbs, the farther one sees into the future. Through the doors of grand, darkened houses, the voices of adults, slow and unstinting as the afternoon, gather letters of the alphabet and dreams to teach children of vanquished utopias, the secrets of the wind and the two-times table.

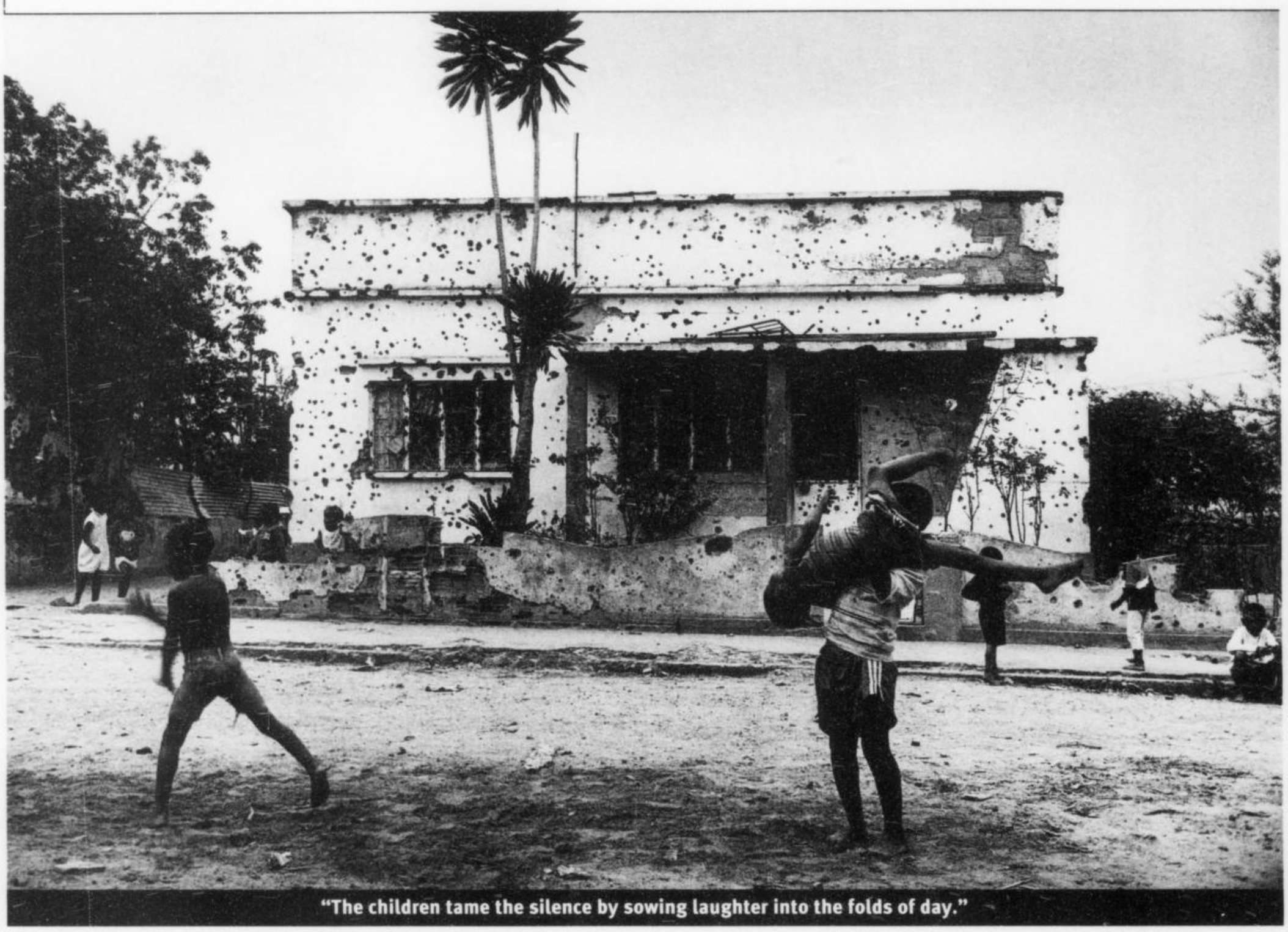
The day advances in the wake of birds—the birds who leave small grains behind so they can retrace their steps and dream once again.

These children live free, while the clocks, jammed by bullets, are destined to repeat time, just as the to and fro of bells sounds the cycle of birth and death.

They tame the silence, sowing laughter into the folds of day. There is still milk in their laughter, fermenting the hopes of an afternoon. Beyond the doors of houses, the children are exploring the labyrinthine walls. They have a key for everything—even to the stairs that they climb up to reach the sky, bared by a missing roof. They sleep on the ground, parched by bullets, under a sheet of stars that slowly descends until the light is eclipsed and night ushered in. ▶

(Continued on page 8)

A child's map



"The children tame the silence by sowing laughter into the folds of day."

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A CITY ON ITS KNEES

"The dogs devour dead bodies, the living eat the dogs," wrote *The Independent*'s special correspondent from Kuito during the nine-month conflict that pitted the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA) against government forces in 1993-1994. Since the country's independence from Portugal in 1975, the two camps have been at war, but this time, they fought on either side of Kuito's main street. The fighting and privations left 40,000 dead. To date, the Angolan conflict has cost close to one million lives.

"At the height of the Bosnian war, my eyes, like many others, were fixed on Sarajevo's agony, while at the same time, another city was on its knees," wrote French writer Bernard-Henri Lévy, who visited the city in 2001 for the French newspaper *Le Monde*. Located at the heart of Angola's main plain, Kuito is the most devastated city in Africa. Following the breakdown of the 1994 Lusaka peace agreement, fighting resumed in December 1998. Since then, UNITA has been upholding a state of insecurity around Kuito. The city, only reachable via armed convoy, is in "a desperate situation," according to its bishop, Dom Jose Nambi.

It counts about 240,000 inhabitants of which close to half are displaced. Like a quarter of Angola's population, war has forced them to flee their homes.

The city has no running water or electrical network.

Close to one child in two dies before reaching the age of five. Apart from a tiny minority profiting from the diamond trade, the majority of Kuito's inhabitants survive through a bit of farming around the city and a host of "odd jobs."

The displaced are almost entirely reliant on the World Food Programme. But for financial reasons, the latter has just been obliged to limit its aid to the "vulnerable groups," such as pregnant women and very young children.

ANGOLA: KEY FIGURES

Population:
12 millions (1999)

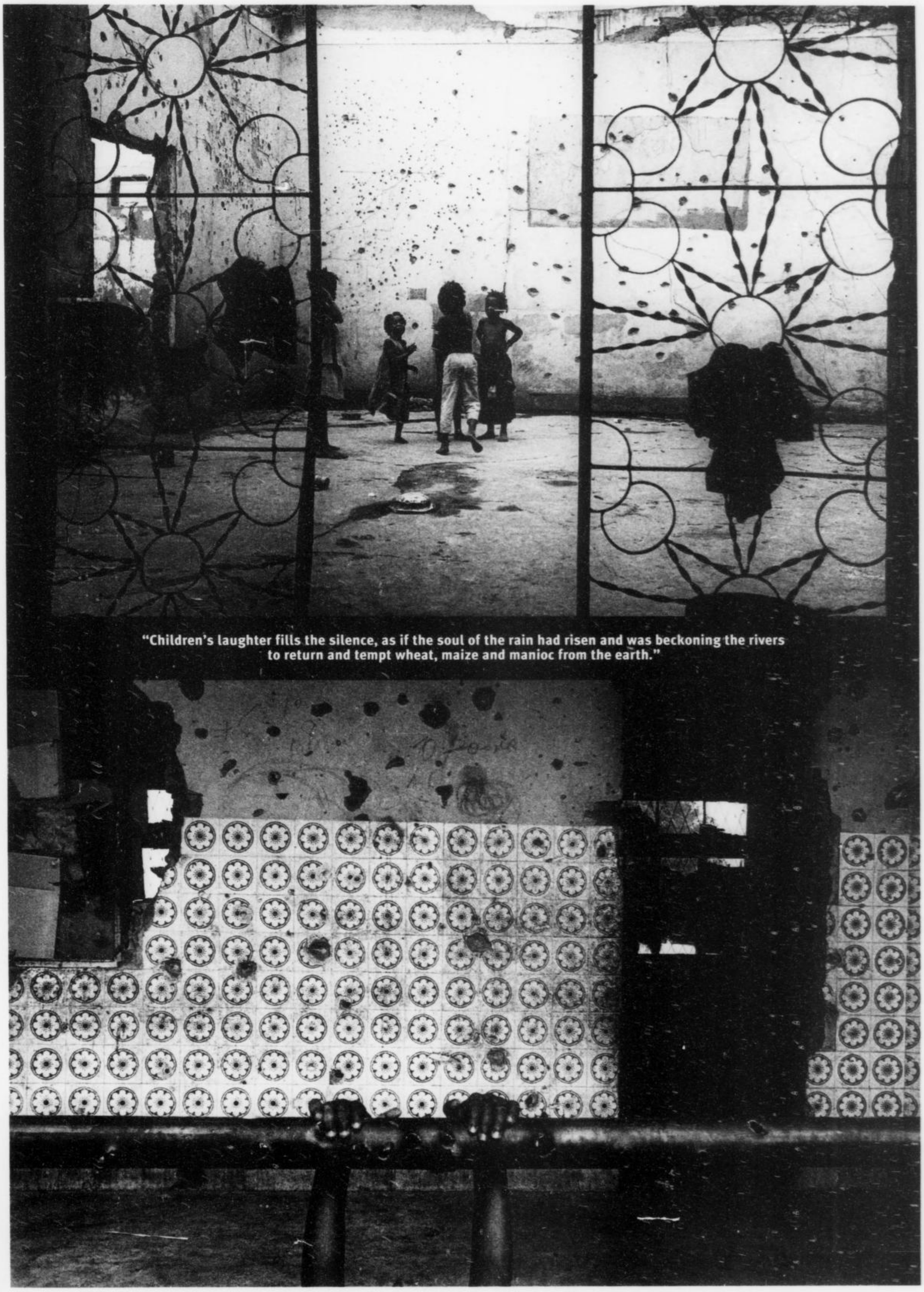
Surface area:
1,247,000 km²

GNP per capita:
$270 (1999)

Life expectancy at birth:
47 years

Adult literacy rate:
n.a.

Source: World Bank.



"Children's laughter fills the silence, as if the soul of the rain had risen and was beckoning the rivers to return and tempt wheat, maize and manioc from the earth."

A child's map

"Children slide along this map with little speed cars made of tin cans."

(Continued from page 5)

This is the map of a war: territories, frontiers and sprawling craters are inscribed in black and white—it is the map of a new world. Children slide along this map with little speed cars made of tin cans, their bodies puffed by the wind, navigating the world to its farthest limits.

They tell each other the tales of the great chiefs, heard from elders sitting around water pipes and fires lit on the edge of night. "Once upon a time there was a man, his wife and a snake," or "Once upon a time, there was a girl who asked many questions," or "Once upon a time, there was a magic box that should have been hidden."

Children in their white Sunday best walk the city from north to south.

One thing is certain: here in Kuito, children push the world onwards to infinity. ■

"The voices of adults, slo

© Guy Tillim/Studio X, Paris

"The two-times table."

One thing is certain: here in Kuito, children push the world onwards to infinity

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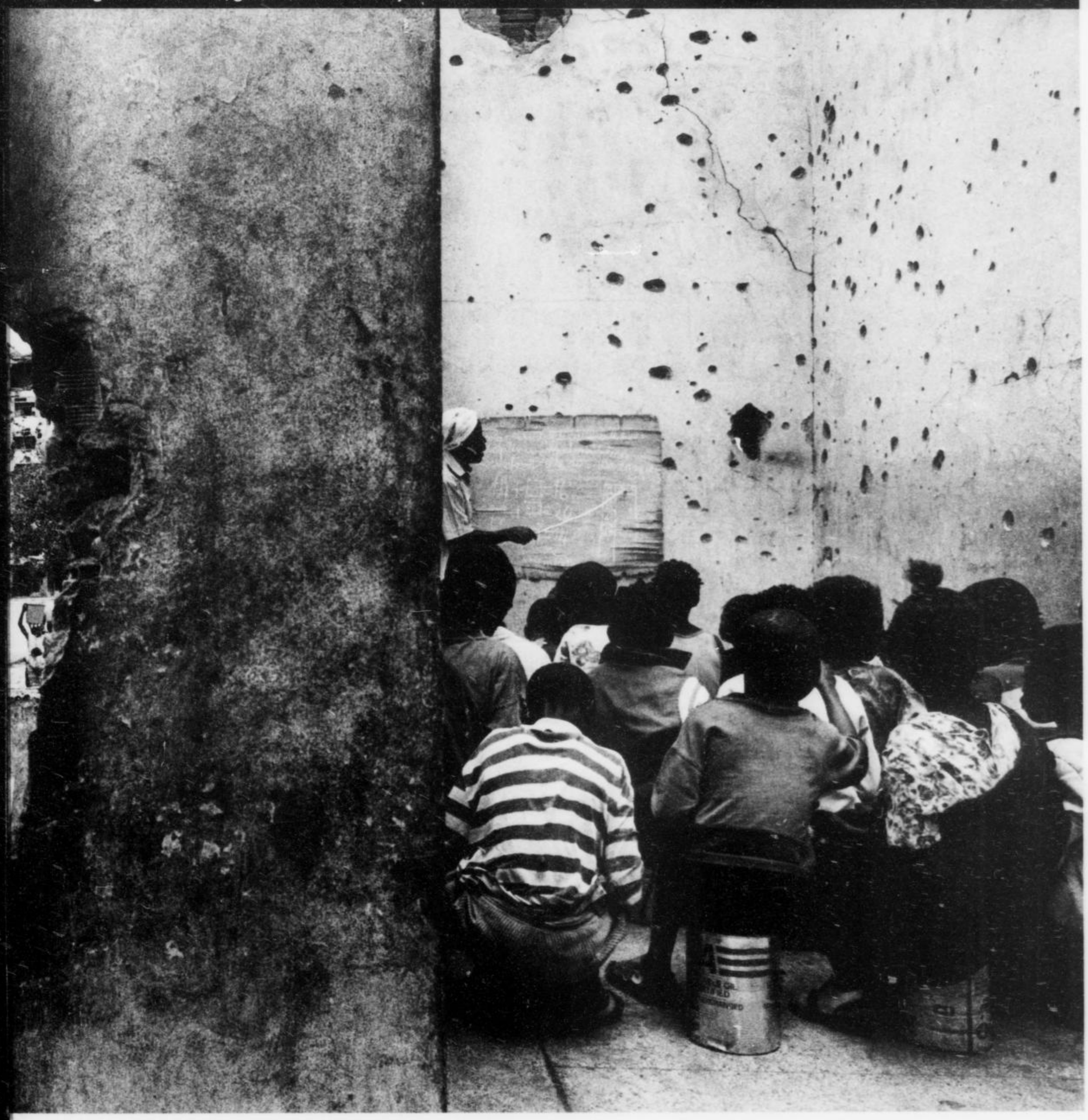
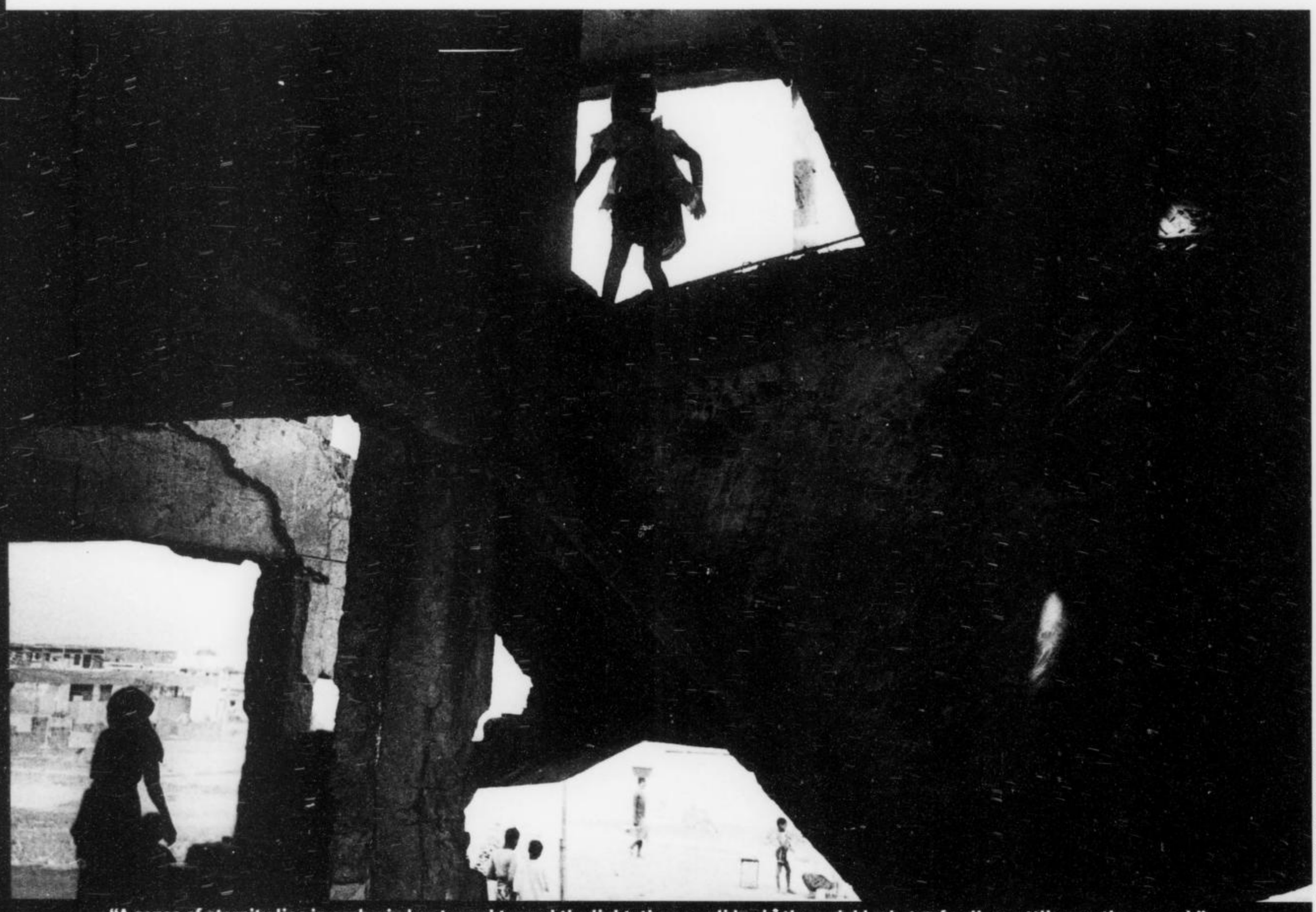


A child's map

Beyond the doors of houses, the children are exploring the labyrinthine walls



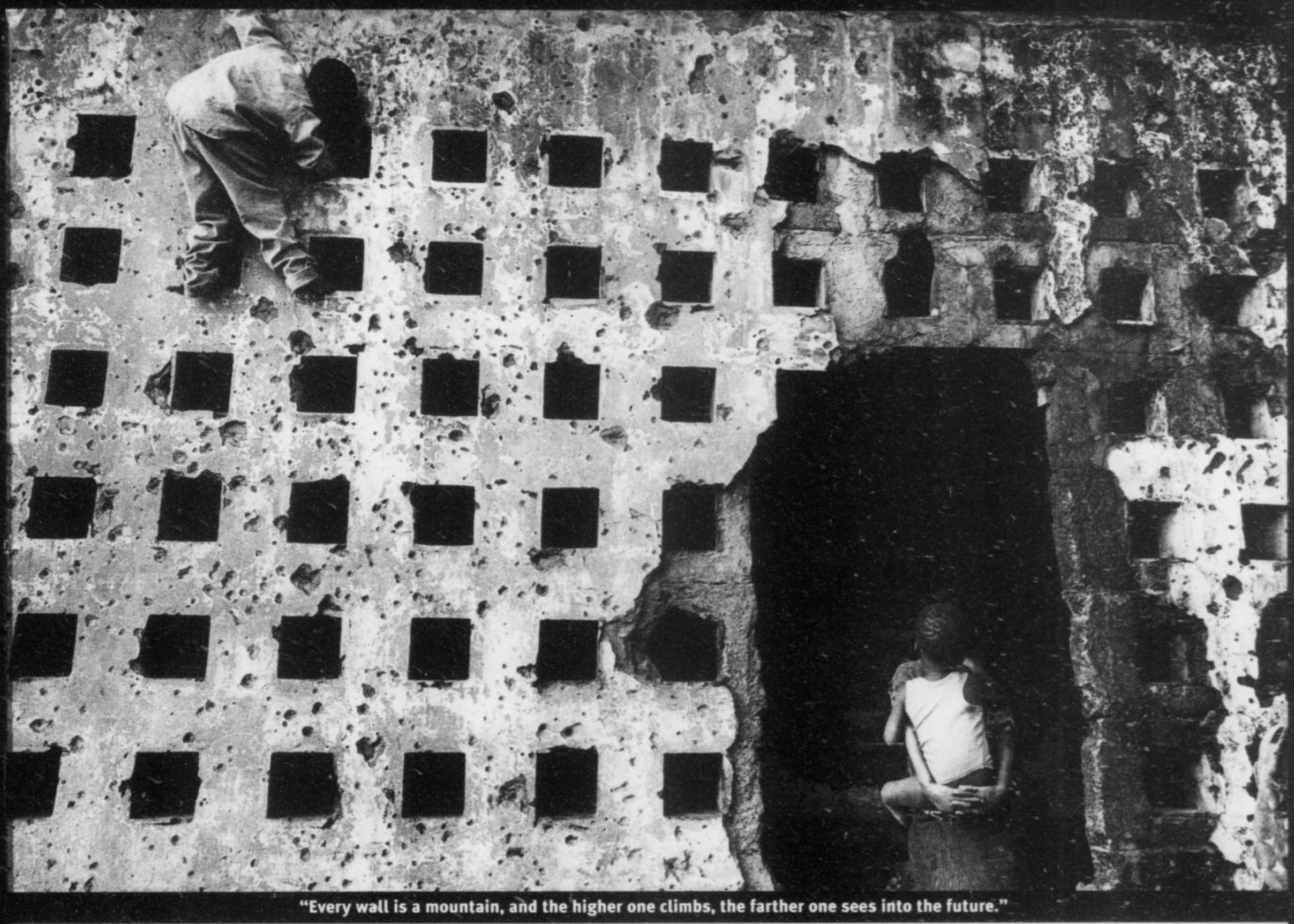
"A sense of eternity lies in each window turned toward the light, the sun glides in through blankets of pollen settling on the ground."

© Guy Tillim/Studio X, Paris

Born in 1952, Ana Paula Tavares specializes in African lusophone literature, which she teaches at the Catholic University of Lisbon.

Poetry: Ritos de passagem *("Rites of passage") published by the Union of Angolan Writers (1985);* O lago da lua *("The lake of the moon"), published by Editorial Caminho, Lisbon, 1989;* Dizes-me coisas amargas como os frutos *("Tell me of bitter things like fruit"), same editor 2001. In prose:* O sangue da buganvilia *("The blood of the bougainvillea"), Cape Verde Portuguese Cultural Centre, 1997.*

Ana Paula Tavares's poetry also appears in an anthology co-edited by UNESCO and Acte Sud, Poésie d'Afrique au Sud du Sahara, 1945-1995.



"Every wall is a mountain, and the higher one climbs, the farther one sees into the future."

"They have a key for everything—even to the stairs that they climb up to reach the sky, bared by a missing roof."

This park is no longer your land

For over a century, millions of indigenous people around the world were driven off their land in the name of nature conservation. While local communities are regaining the right to manage these protected areas, their struggle often runs up against deep prejudice

MARCUS COLCHESTER

DIRECTOR OF THE UK-BASED FOREST PEOPLES PROGRAMME AND WINNER OF THE BRITISH ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE'S LUCY MAIR MEDAL FOR APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY

Creating protected areas to conserve nature is a recent invention, born in the tumultuous rush of land grabbing during the American conquest of the west. This was the time when pioneers, the U.S. cavalry, gold miners and Indians struggled to impose their different visions of life and land use on the continent.

When the first national parks were created (see box), one single vision had excluded the others. The 1964 U.S. Wilderness Act formalized this ideal notion of nature as wilderness, untouched by humans. It stated that national parks were to preserve areas "where man himself is a visitor who doesn't remain." The reality, however, was different: most of these areas were inhabited, used, managed and owned by indigenous peoples. Indeed, nearly all the most important protected areas in the United States are owned or claimed by Indians.

Many indigenous peoples remain perplexed by western views of what conservation means. "My Dad used to say 'that's our pantry.' We knew about all the plants and animals, when to pick, when to hunt," remarked Ruby Dunstan of the Nl'aka'pamux people, who have been trying to prevent the logging of their ancestral lands around Stein Valley in the Canadian province of Alberta. "But some of the white environmentalists seemed to think if something was declared a wilderness, no-one was allowed inside because it was so fragile. So they have put a fence around it, or maybe around themselves."

An export model

Over a century, the U.S. model of nature conservation has been exported worldwide. In Africa, the practice of mass exclusion of indigenous peoples to make way for protected areas intensified in the 1960s and has continued to this day. The Central Kalahari Game Reserve was originally set up for the benefit of the resident hunting and gathering San, but they are currently being expelled from the area by the government of Botswana.

Some one million square kilometres of forests, pasturelands and farmlands have been expropriated in Africa to make way for conservation over the course of a century. No one has been able to document how many indigenous people were displaced as a consequence, but they must number in the millions.

Early warning

One widow belonging to the Twa people recalls how she was expelled from the Congo's Kahuzi-Biega National Park in the 1960s. "It was early in the morning. I looked through the door and saw people in uniforms with guns. Then one of them forced the door of our house and started shouting that we had to leave immediately because the park is not our land. I first did not understand what he was talking about because all my ancestors have lived on these lands. They were so violent that I left with my children."

Denied their traditional lands and livelihoods, these Twa—traditional hunting and gathering "pygmies"—now eke out an existence in a number of squatter camps on the fringes of their once-extensive forest territory. They suffer extreme malnutrition, landlessness, demoralization and despair.

We likewise lack accurate statistics about Asia. In 1993, an estimate by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia suggests that in India alone, as many as 600,000 tribal people have been forced off their land due to the setting up of protected areas.

Concerns about the social impact of protected areas were voiced from their inception. By the 1970s, UNESCO had developed the idea of "biosphere reserves," in which strictly protected "core zones"—the old type of protected area—were to be encircled with "buffer zones," where provisions were made for the local inhabitants to continue their traditional lifestyles and engage in controlled community development projects. Conservation agencies implementing projects along these lines could get them listed by UNESCO to gain international recognition of their efforts. However, while enlightened for their time, the management of these experimental reserves

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Standing up for their rights: in Br

has not been markedly successful from the local peoples' point of view. They continue the tradition of imposing outsiders' views of nature on local peoples' lands.

A review of buffer zone projects, carried out by the World Conservation Union in 1991 concluded that they had been, for the main part, "disappointing...Local people, often with good reason, frequently see parks as government-imposed restrictions on their legitimate rights. Patrolling by guards, demarcation of boundaries and provision of tourist facilities will therefore not deter them from agricultural encroachment."

their livelihoods by spearing rhinos, lions and other wildlife. To compensate the Maasai, a "buffer zone" was built up, with World Bank support. New watering points were established outside the "core zone" and compensation fees were planned. Promising at first, the project broke down—compensation went unpaid and the water supply system deteriorated.

In the Philippines in the early 1970s, World Bank plans to fund the construction of dams on the Chico River, which would have displaced some 80,000 Kalinga and Bontoc people from their ancestral lands in

Indians from various indigenous groups stage a protest over territorial boundaries.

The report also noted that the best buffer zone projects had "not been short-term aid projects but initiatives taken by local community groups or resource managers who [...] made creative attempts to solve the day-to-day problems which they faced."

A well-documented example of these difficulties is the Amboseli National Park in Kenya. Established on Maasai lands, it initially denied them access to dry season pastures and watering points. The Maasai showed their resentment for the loss of

central Luzon, led to co-ordinated resistance and the emergence of strong local associations promoting land rights and autonomy. Similar struggles in the Americas, Asia and Africa have resulted in the emergence of vigorous national and international coalitions of indigenous people, which have pushed their demands at the United Nations and other international bodies.

The movement has been dramatically successful in obliging a re-evaluation of international human rights principles. As a result, existing conventions have been ▶

Taming the Wild West

On June 30, 1864, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Land Grant bill, giving 39,200 acres of federal land encompassing Yosemite Valley to the state of California for public enjoyment and preservation. The creation of the first national park took place during the disruptions of the American Civil War at a time when a devastating series of "Indian Wars" was being waged to subdue Indian autonomy. Thus the startling landscapes of Yosemite, substantially an outcome of Indian systems of land use, were proposed for conservation by the very same settlers who, twelve years previously, had waged the "Mariposa Indian War" against the area's indigenous people—the Miwok. The main proponent of the park, LaFayette Burnell, who led the Mariposa Battalion and professed a "take-no-prisoners" approach to the Miwok, wanted to "sweep the territory of any scattered bands that might infest it."

Once the Park was established, it was run by the U.S. Army for the next 52 years before being taken over by the National Parks Service.

The Miwok petitioned the U.S. government in 1890. They called for compensation for their losses and denounced the managers of the park. "The valley is cut up completely with dusty, sandy roads leading from the hotels of the white in every direction... All seem to come only to hunt money... The valley has been taken away from us [for] a pleasure ground...." Their pleas were ignored and further evictions of remnant Miwok settlements were made in 1906, 1929 and as late as 1969.

What the Miwok had noted was that the national parks, set up to preserve "wilderness" regions "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations" were also designed with a profit motive. Indeed, the first parks of Yosemite and Yellowstone, were created largely as a result of pressure from the railway-building lobby, which sought to increase the numbers of fare-paying passengers by routing their tracks near scenic sites for what today we have reinvented as "eco-tourism." ■

reviewed and new ones developed which recognize that indigenous peoples have the right to own, control and manage their traditional territories and to represent themselves through their own institutions. Recently the UN established a Permanent Forum to address their concerns.

The same movement has also demanded that conservationists change their thinking and practice. For example, in 1998, tribal people in southern India forced out of the Indira Gandhi National Park as part of an "eco-development" scheme funded by the Global Environment Facility, successfully addressed their concerns to the World Bank Inspection Panel. Communities impacted by the Bank's projects can appeal to this independent body if they believe the Bank is not adhering to its principles. Their complaints were upheld.

Rethinking old ways

By the 1990s, it became clear that very many of the protected areas imposed against the will of local residents were failing to achieve their conservation objectives. The denial of indigenous rights only meant that protected areas seeded their own failure by surrounding themselves by hostility. The Manas Tiger Reserve in Assam (India), for example, enclosed part of the traditional homeland of the Bodo. Local resentment led to three quarters of the rhinoceroses being killed.

To align with the changes in international law, the World Conservation Union revised its systems of categories of protected areas to accept that indigenous peoples may own and manage protected areas, not just state agencies as previously required. In the 1990s, the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), the World Conservation Congress and the World Commission on Protected Areas all adopted new policies and resolutions which strongly endorse indigenous peoples' rights and promote the co-management of protected areas, based on negotiated agreements.

Putting these principles into practice, however, is easier said than done. In many countries, laws on protected areas automatically extinguish residents' rights of natural resource use, free movement and access. Implanting the "new model" of conservation implies undertaking major national reforms.

Indeed, because of deeply held prejudices, governments in many countries continue to deny indigenous peoples' rights and seek to assimilate them into the national majority through forced relocation, re-education and by breaking up their communal lands, as in Malaysia and Indonesia. National policies towards indigenous peoples thus also need reforming if conservation is to wear a human face. Recent changes in the Venezuelan constitution recognize indigenous peoples' rights to their "habitats" and a law has just been passed encouraging Indians to map and demarcate their own lands to regularize their rights in these areas.

Community-based conservation also implies real challenges for indigenous peoples themselves. Regaining control of their territories may mean reactivating long-submerged systems of self-government. Changes in indigenous economies will also need to be addressed—many indigenous peoples have adopted new ways of farming their lands, harvesting timbers and other natural resources. Many now hunt with new weapons and use industrial technologies to process and transport crops. Customary systems of regulating access to these resources now need rethinking if they are to be effective. In the Brazilian Amazon, the WWF is now working with the Xavante Indians, to help them devise new strategies for managing their reserves. The aim is to strengthen traditional ways of managing resources with new knowledge about environmental limits.

As the International Alliance of Indigenous-Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests noted in 1996: "Indigenous peoples recognize that it is in their long-term interest to use their resources sustainably and respect the need for environmental conservation. They recognize that the expertise of conservation organizations can be of use to their self-development and seek a mutually beneficial relationship based on trust, transparency and accountability." ■

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A new mission for protected areas? Tourists glide along Botswana's Okava

World Rainforest Movement:
www.wrm.org
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World Conservation Union: www.iucn.org
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THIS PARK IS NO LONGER YOUR LAND

Tales of white elephants

Foreign companies keep the lion's share of ecotourism profits but the Makuleke of South Africa are trailblazing a juicy commercial venture based on their firm control of ancestral land and resources

EDDIE KOCH

DIRECTOR OF THE MAFISA RESEARCH AND PLANNING AGENCY AND FREELANCE WRITER

Delta, led by local guides.

Winning back land rights is one side of the battle waged by indigenous people, finding ways to live off the earth is another. Is ecotourism the answer?

Not always says a study conducted for the Ford Foundation by Mafisa Research and Planning, a South African agency specialized in ecotourism. It examined the economics of about 30 game lodges in national parks and game reserves across southern Africa, which is fast becoming a prime tourist destination.

Bottom of the ladder jobs

Until recently, the upscale lodges dotting the wilderness were excluded from the state-owned national parks, where hunting is also prohibited. This is beginning to change as ongoing land reforms, which began in the mid-1990s, give indigenous people often chased from their lands during apartheid, the right to use them for sustainable commercial activities, particularly in the field of ecotourism.

On the books, ecotourism rings like a sensible way out of poverty and underdevelopment. The U.S. based International Ecotourism Society defines it as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people."

Yet few studies have actually examined its impact on local people's livelihoods, making the Ford study something of a landmark. Its conclusion: local residents in southern Africa generally get a raw deal, amounting to little more than a few poorly paid and unskilled jobs. Most of the money spent goes to foreign-owned airlines, hotels, travel agencies and transportation companies, along with consumer goods produced abroad to satisfy tourists' tastes. Indeed, the World Bank estimates that 55 percent of tourist spending in developing countries eventually leaks back to the North, while some organizations put the rate at 90 percent, especially in southern Africa.

There are, however, a few countervailing examples in the region. In the far north of South Africa's famed Kruger National Park, about 900 families belonging to the Makuleke tribe have won back the rights to own and use about 25,000 hectares of one of the park's most spectacular landscapes which, according to some experts, contains up to two-thirds of its biodiversity. They are now dealing with a commercial operator, Matswani Safaris, to develop a luxury 24-bed lodge, along with a tent-camp and even a museum. Instead of resettling on the land, they have decided to use it as an economic base for their villages on the park's frontier.

In addition to lodging, the Makuleke have also decided to offer some trophy hunting, arranged by a private safari company. Last year, two elephants and two buffaloes were hunted, which brought about $57,000 for local development projects (and meat which was distributed among Makuleke villages). The yields are supposed to increase this year (including animals like nyala and zebra), which adds fuel to a simmering controversy about trophy hunting in general. However, the Makuleke leaders vow to phase out the hunt once the other tourism projects turn a decent profit.

Negotiating power

When running at 60 percent capacity, the lodge will pay rent of $75,000 a year to the Makuleke people, in addition to about $150,000 in yearly wages to local employees. In total, the programme should inject some $35,000 a year into the coffers of the Makuleke—roughly $400 per family, in a region where four out of every ten adults is unemployed and the average annual wage is about $750.

Projects like this offer food for thought on the eve of the United Nations Year of Ecotourism, slated for 2002. One of the keys lies in equal terms: where local residents have strong rights over their wildlife and other natural resources, they can negotiate with private operators to ensure that their interests—financial, cultural and environmental—are protected. ■

Indian textiles find their patron

High quality crafts can't survive without skillful marketing, argues the author, who has woven close ties with Indian craftspeople to build up a business. When will aid agencies follow suit?

JENNY HOUSEGO

ART HISTORIAN AND TEXTILES EXPERT

As an art historian, I had long been fascinated by the fragments of medieval hand-painted and block-printed fabrics excavated in the rubbish heaps of Fostat, old Cairo. These were almost certainly made in Gujarat in western India, and attest to a flourishing trade with Egypt in Indian textiles in the 13th and 14th centuries.

Some years ago, I decided to see if I could revive the patterns of these ancient textiles with techniques still available today.

I met Mohammad Bhai Siddiqui—a famous master block-cutter and printer from Kutch in Gujarat—and showed him illustrations of some of these fragments, now in museums in different parts of the world. He was very excited, said he had no blocks like this, but recognized them as part of his tradition. He promised to see what he could do.

Mohammad Bhai was as good as his word. From an illustration of a small fragment, he had worked out the repeat in the design. He had created a superb Fostat tablecloth, in rich, glowing colours, made from the same natural ingredients that had been used in the past.

We launched the tablecloths onto the market, certain that buyers would be as excited as we were. Alas, we were disappointed. Long used to Indian block prints being cheap, buyers found our tablecloths too expensive. They were unable to appreciate the centuries of expertise that had gone into recreating them.

Why should craft be cheap? Why should beautiful, hand-made things be expected to compete with mass production? Why have the crafts of India, once so highly renowned, become associated with bad quality, running colours, boring designs?

Because the old traditions of patronage have not been replaced by new ones. Because craftsmen, no longer working for their own communities, have great difficulty in finding new markets and fall prey to filling orders where only the price counts. Because the idea of high-quality craft items aimed at discerning markets is not yet fully understood in this region. Because the importance of aid in helping to improve quality and identify market outlets has not been addressed by governments and crafts organizations.

Craft and commerce are inextricably linked. Very early on, an embroiderer in

Why should craft be cheap? Why should beautiful, hand-made things be expected to compete with mass production?

the first village centre established by my company said to me, "How fortunate that you are a commercial company, because you have to make money and therefore so will we!" She then told me about a government agency and an NGO that had set up training programmes in the village, but as there was no instrument for marketing or selling any of the products, the projects had collapsed.

This is not a unique story. I hear the same all over India. A friend in Delhi who tirelessly promotes craft bewails that aid is always available if she wants to build a shed in a village, buy some looms or dig a well, but not to help in marketing crafts.

Without promotion or marketing, crafts are perceived as charity. People buy them to "help the poor craftsmen" rather than because they are well-made and a delight to have.

From the village up

For the tradition of hand-made textiles to survive, new patrons have to be found. My long interest in textiles and in craft convinced me that something could be done to revive India's fabled reputation of producing the world's finest fabrics.

For many years, my interest in the field was academic, but I have always enjoyed working in the field and learning about the past from the present. When I came to live in India almost 15 years ago, the two began to merge; I found I wanted to develop textile crafts myself.

This is why, together with my husband David, we established Shades of India, a company that makes high quality textiles for the home. We do not believe that craft should remain static, so we combine the best of traditional techniques with innovative designs, some ancient, others contemporary. We have established our markets ourselves, presenting our collections to buyers, instead of them telling us what they want. A buyer from a famous London shop once told us: "Make me dream!" This is what we attempt to do. And increasingly, international buyers are coming to us because they recognize that India is the only place left in the world where such a variety of hand-made textile techniques can still be found.

It is not an easy road. There is nothing I enjoy more than sitting with a group of craftspeople and working out ideas for a new collection. We work with craftspeople all over India, and at the centres we have established not far from Delhi, in villages where there had been no employment for women before.

The same philosophy lies behind the Kashmir Loom Company, which I established a couple of years ago in Srinagar

© Jenny Housego, Paris

Labour of love: in Srinagar, Habibullah Palgaru, aged 80, delved into his art.

with Kashmiri brothers Asaf and Hamid Ali. Kashmir understands the spinning and weaving of high quality wools like nowhere else in the world. The softest of these is Shahtoosh, now banned because the wild Chiru antelope from which it comes, faces extinction.

Pashmina is also timeless, weightless, and a delight to wear. It comes from the Changra goat, that thrives in Ladakh and Tibet at altitudes of over 4,000 metres. This must not be confused with the poor-quality fabric mixed with silk and other fibres, from Nepal, marketed under the same name.

In spring, nomad herders lovingly comb out the fleece by hand. This is then brought to Kashmir to be carded and spun by hand and woven on traditional hand-looms. This gossamer yarn is too delicate to be treated by any machine. No wonder, then, that it is so expensive. What else could it be, when so much skill and time have gone into making a shawl?

Team work

We work closely with our craftsmen. At first hesitant to experiment, they are now the creative force behind what we do. They know their craft can survive only by bringing new vitality into it, that the market is demanding, and that we work together as a team, respecting each others' talent and contribution. They make a good living, and their sons and daughters often follow in their footsteps.

I feel deeply privileged to be a part of their lives, their craft. As an art historian I was an outsider, an onlooker into the art of their ancestors. Now I am living it with them.

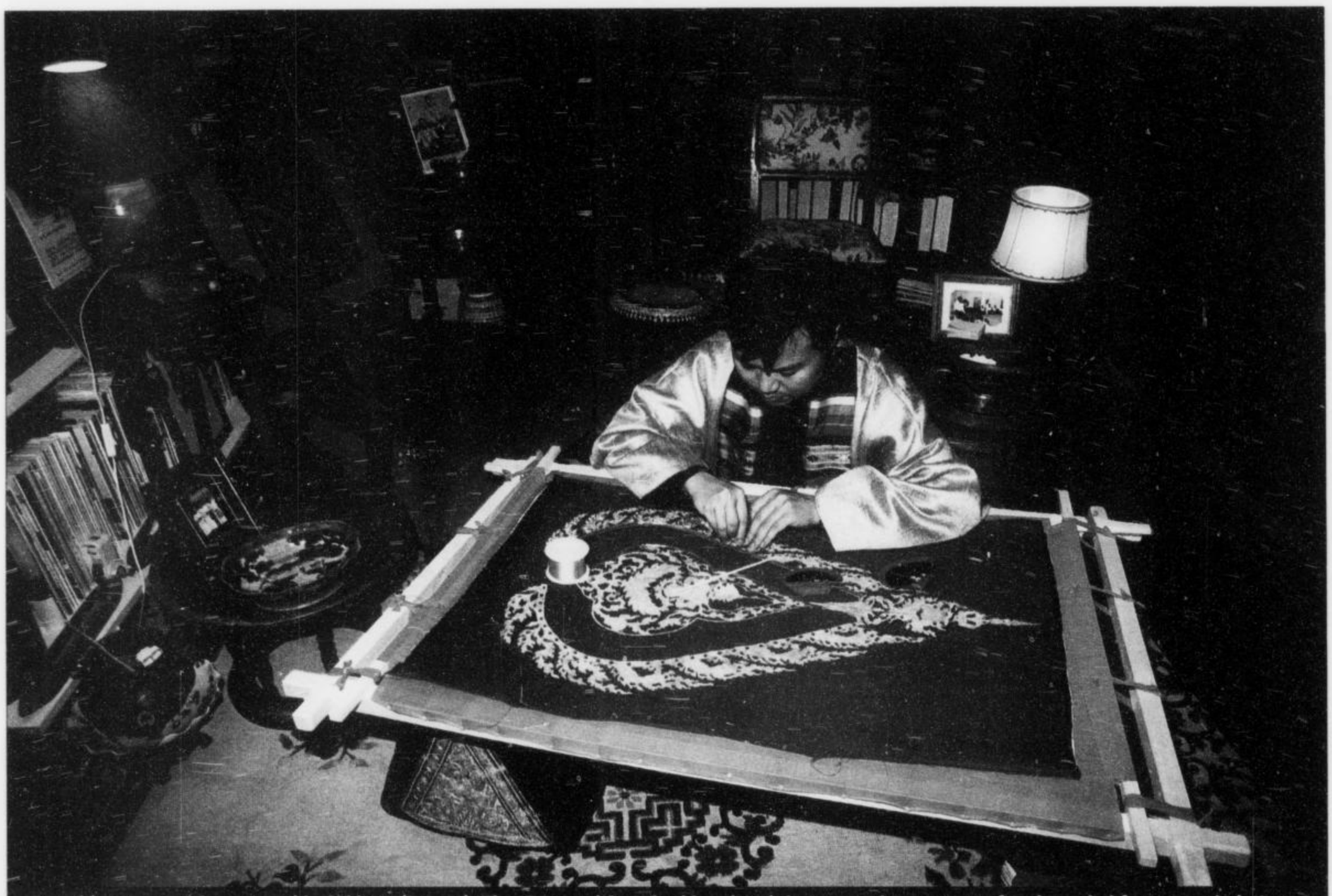
If large agencies could add carefully thought-out marketing and sales strategy into their craft development projects, and do on a larger scale what we attempt in our very small way, what a change this would make. ■

PRIZED TALENTS

Bashir Ahmad Jaan toiled two and a half years to produce "Samavar," an exquisite Pashmina shawl embroidered with silk thread in 14 different hues. His skill, inherited from his forefathers, was rewarded with the UNESCO crafts prize this year. He shared the $5,000 first place (for the Asia region) with Kim Taeja of the Republic of Korea, who created "Gilsando," a six-panelled folding screen, representing the finest silk-thread court embroidery.

Established in 1990, the prize encourages craftspeople to merge their technical mastery of age-old skills with inventive and contemporary designs. Awarded by international juries during regional crafts fairs around the world, the prizes are given to works of exceptional artistic quality, which are also deemed marketable.

UNESCO works closely with the International Trade Centre in Geneva to help craftspeople market their products both locally and internationally. "Though UNESCO's role ends when the actual business of marketing begins, the activities of the crafts programme do not make a separation between marketing and art," explains Indrasen Vencatachellum, chief of the crafts and design section. "The basic question for craftspeople is how to sell their products, because very often, their craft is their only means of subsistence." One of UNESCO's most recent projects (April 2001) is the opening of a crafts showroom near Luang Prabang in Laos. A renovated building now serves as a centre where crafts produced in workshops in three nearby villages are marketed directly to customers, allowing craftspeople to reap higher profits by selling without intermediaries. ■



From his two-room home outside Orléans (France), Tiao Somsanith embroiders by night to complete a prayer fan, intended for a pagoda in Laos.

© Ngoc Loan Lam, Orléans

A prince embroiderer without a kingdom

Tiao Somsanith is among the last of a dying breed skilled in gold-thread embroidering, an ancient tradition from the court of Luang Prabang in Laos. Today, he is trying to save this vanishing art, without resorting to commercialism

NGOC LOAN LAM

JOURNALIST SPECIALIZED IN SOUTH-EAST ASIAN ISSUES

The Laotian prince-embroiderer Tiao Somsanith has lived in the French royal city of Orléans, or more exactly in the suburb of Saint-Marceau, since 1985. To reach the two small rooms of his home filled with Laotian court treasures, you must leave Orléans and cross the Loire River. With a little imagination, it recalls the Mekong, which flows past Luang Prabang, once the royal capital of Laos, where the smooth-faced, nimble-fingered "young man" was born 43 years ago.

That court vanished after the Pathet Lao communists took power in 1975 in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. "My maternal grandfather was the last viceroy of Laos," says the prince. "My paternal grandfather was a famous court historian, and his wife was an excellent embroiderer. My father was advisor to the king in Vientiane, the administrative capital."

A secret garden

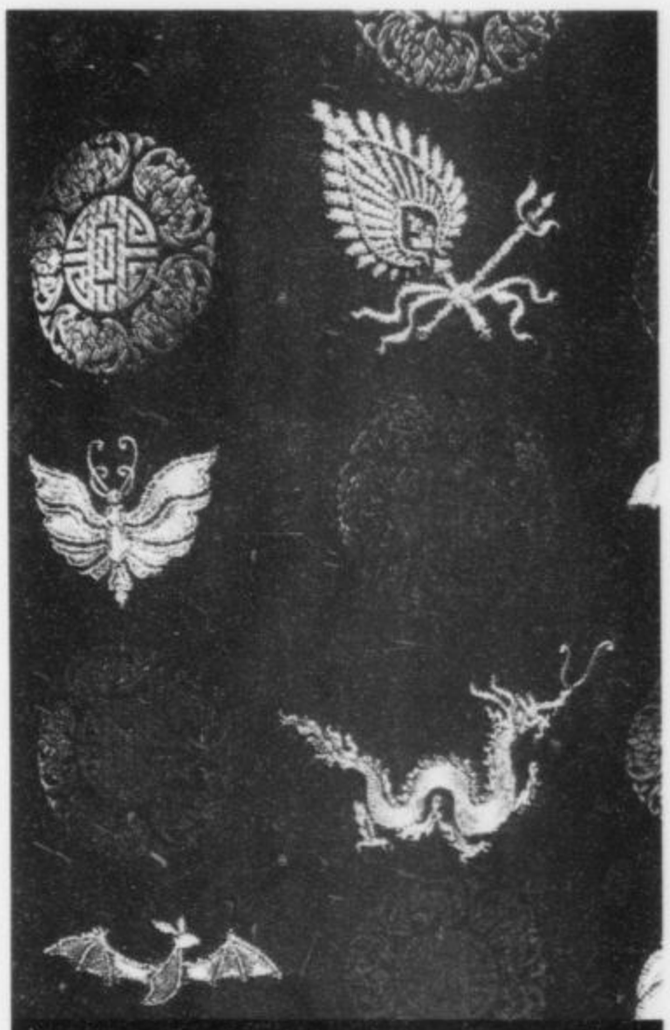
He has not lost stock of his rank and duties. "The mission of the royal family and the viceroy was to protect culture and tradition," he says. "One of them is the gold thread embroidery that is specific to the Luang Prabang court. Only women of noble birth were allowed to learn this craft, which probably came from China, judging from the technique and symbolism of designs, such as the dragon."

During the Laotian cultural week last March in Orléans, visitors could admire a lavish red and gold silk ensemble that the queen would have worn either for her coronation in Luang Prabang, had the monarchy not been abolished, or to celebrate New Year's, had she not perished in a re-education camp. It took the prince one long year working at night to make the garment, since he earns a living by running a day-time creativity and self-expression workshop for mentally handicapped adults. Before that, he gained degrees in fine arts and psychology in France.

"I drew inspiration from the writings of my father, who was in charge of

protocol," he says. "I remember the festivals that punctuated life at the court, where an appropriate outfit was necessary for each ceremony. This work represents both my secret garden, my history, and the cultural heritage of Laos."

The costume reflects the court's hierarchies, with colours and embroideries corresponding to social status. Culling from a repertory based on wildlife, flowers, mythology and Buddhist iconography, embroiderers were nevertheless free to compose nuances, the movement of embroidered patterns and to model reliefs with gold and silver braiding. "The yellow of the jacket, reserved for the queen, recalls the dazzling sun, and the red of the skirt evokes the blood of life," explains Somsanith.



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Designs inspired by childhood memories.

An arduous apprenticeship

The royal ornamentation embroidered by the prince includes golden phoenixes taking flight among interlacing plant patterns. Like an endless river, they continue on the back of the jacket, suggesting the eternal life cycle and the wheel of reincarnation. "I've embroidered good-luck bats, birds of paradise with elephant trunks and butterflies symbolizing the ephemeral," he says.

Somsanith borrowed these designs from inscriptions he gazed at on the ceilings of pagodas as a child. He embroidered without using the carved wooden templates, which were indispensable for beginners who fastened them to silk with big stitches and reproduced the outlines with gold thread.

Only experienced embroiderers between the ages of 30 and 40 reached that level of perfection. The road was long and the apprenticeship arduous. The prince, who was the last in a family of nine children living in Vientiane, spent summers with his grandmother in Luang Prabang. "I was so rambunctious that my parents sent me to keep her company," he recalls laughing. "I also met some of the requirements for learning this exclusively feminine profession, which is passed down from mother to daughter."

At six, like all nimble-fingered apprentices, the prince was coating silk threads with wax to make them straighter and threading them into needles for his grandmother and aunts, who worked in a special room every morning. In the hope of being released from this painstaking work, sometimes the young prince secretly finished his grandmother's embroidery, trying to copy her style.

"By the time I was 10 or 12, I already had a certain amount of experience," he says. "My grandmother probably guessed what I was up to, and introduced me to the art of purling by letting me finish the buds on a bouquet of flowers she had started."

Back to the pagoda

The different steps in an embroiderer's career were clearly spelled out. Little girls traced the edges framing the designs and decorated pillows and prayer cushions. Adolescents embroidered skirts and collars. Adult women made their wedding dresses, ceremonial costumes and burial clothes. Between 50 and 60, at the peak of their skills, they gradually stopped making secular garments to focus on religious accessories intended for pagodas.

Religion is exactly the means by which Somsanith intends to breathe new life into his art. In August 2001, the embroiderer-prince is going to Luang Prabang to offer one of his works—a prayer fan decorated with a Buddha in the teaching position—to the Sene pagoda.

Now this guardian of an endangered tradition has just one goal in mind: passing it on to young Laotians, and introducing the diaspora to the art of living that goes with it.

He refuses to give into the temptation of the market. "Some of my relatives embroider to order for tourists, especially from Thailand, and rich families of the diaspora. Gold-thread embroidery is acquiring a market value and losing its meaning. The women wearing them are parvenus who only care about the glittering outer appearance of things without knowing their intrinsic value."

The prince wants to pass on both technique and meaning. "Embroidery is more than just a technique.... Even though an embroidered garment might only be worn once during an exceptional ceremony, it requires an apprenticeship that is so long it builds character, an idea that has fallen by the wayside. Passing this tradition down from one generation to the next also teaches future artists that they are merely practitioners. Before setting down to work, my grandmother performed her devotions to the inspiring spirits and the ancestors who trained her to bring about her act of creation."

With exhibitions, lectures and a documentary made with the French national research council, Somsanith is also sounding the alarm on the disappearance of other crafts connected to gold-thread embroidery, such as lacquering. "The last master lacquerer is 81 years old and no longer working. He has stopped making the baskets decorated with a gilded plant frieze that were used as models for skirt hems." ■

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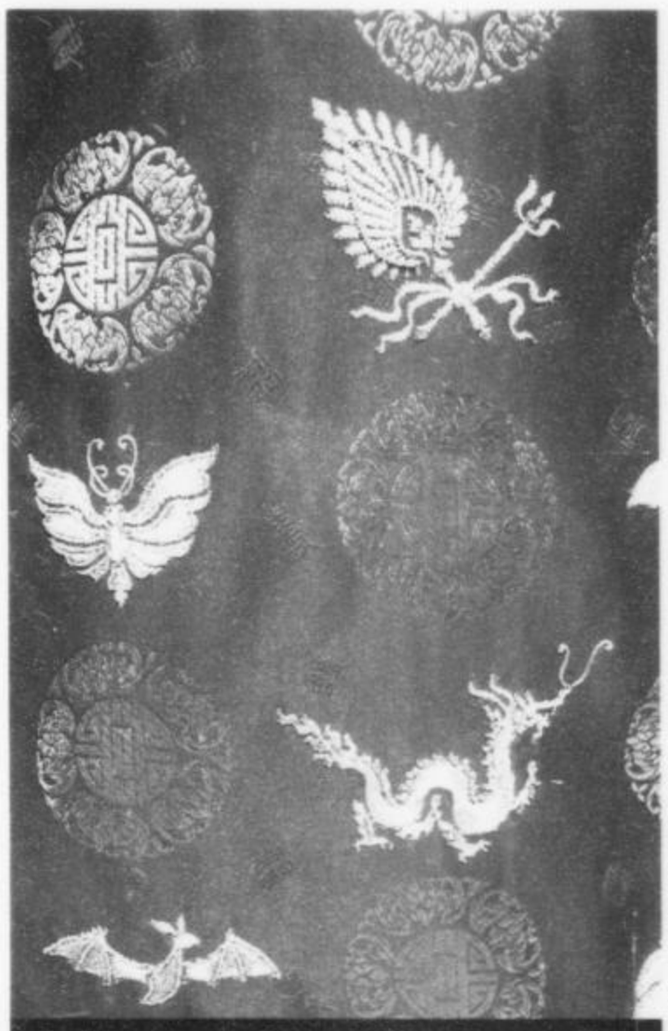

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AMS OF PERFECTION...

body shop

OPINION

I AM NOT A **HERO**

BY ALBERT BRITT ROBILLARD

SOCIOLOGY PROFESSOR AND SENIOR RESEARCHER, UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII,
AND AUTHOR OF *MEANING OF A DISABILITY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF PARALYSIS* (TEMPLE, 1999)

The faculty at the University of Hawaii went on strike on April 5, 2001. I participated every day on the picket line and in a demonstration at the state Capitol Building. I sat with a sign on my legs, tied to my wheelchair, saying "UHPA (University of Hawaii Professional Assembly) on Strike." I had a button pinned to my shirt, reading "United We Bargain, Divided We Beg."

During the strike, many people often told me or commented to friends within earshot, "Britt is really a hero." There was also the constant question: "Are you tired?". I was not tired. But I did feel as if people were dismissing me, as if people wanted me, along with my ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) atrophied body and wheelchair, to go away. (This disease attacks motor neuron cells in the body, brain and spinal cord, leading to varying amounts of paralysis and often death.)

Another recurring question that people asked my wife or accompanying research assistant was, "How is he doing?" That question was never directly addressed to me. Strangers, as well as people who knew me well, applied the stereotypes of the tired hero to me. No one had evil or limiting intentions. Yet they rarely stayed long enough for any form of interaction. I cannot speak and have very limited movement of my head and neck but, like anyone else, I enjoy and require conversation. My wife and helpers can read my lips, gaze and gestures. Yet very few of my supposed admirers were interested in a chat.

Being called a hero for participating in everyday life events, like the strike, is not limited to American culture. I was recently invited to Japan to address universities and communities. The listeners would break into sobs and wind up calling me a hero. My speeches were videotaped and played over and over on Japanese television. I could not go to a restaurant without being noticed.

I do not want to leave the impression that I did not enjoy the trip to Japan or the participation in the faculty strike. I had many authentic conversations in both settings with people who knew my sociological work. However, I did not have the anonymity that most people enjoy. I find myself powerless in changing newspaper accounts or television stories about my so-called heroism. I cringe when I read reviews of my sociological work, typifying me as a hero.

If limiting references are contained in languages and the implicit knowledge accompanying ways of speaking, what can be done to free up the disabled? There are two tasks. The first is to play back the constricting language on those who utter it. If I get the chance, I ask those who ask me whether I'm tired if they are tired and in need of rest. This provokes awareness. It also ruffles some feathers.

The second task is to teach people the awesome power in ways of speaking and writing about disabled people. Power and the entirety of social institutions are contained and continuously reproduced in ways of talking, writing, reading, and visually representing society. We are agents in this reproducing society and are capable of change in the way we linguistically regard the disabled. Although we have laws to protect their civil rights, we need to go much further and address the power of discourse.

By playing back the language on my well-meaning friends and colleagues, I do not want to impose a kind of *sturm und drang* discipline of a movement. My objective is to make people conscious of the way words and phrases create, make things. I really want to create the festivity of the picket line, where middle-class professors felt free to identify with, if only for a moment, historical working-class labour strikes. I want disabled people to experience the same freedom, where their disability is ignored. I am tired of being trapped in categories; I no longer want to be a hero.

I wish to thank Katherine Trowell and Shannon Gau for their assistance in preparing this paper.

1. SHATTERED IDEALS

The body **jigsaw**

Imagine the body as a canvas, a space to mix and match physical and cultural elements in defining who or what you want to be. Here lies the great paradox. The scarring and piercing of tribal aesthetics are all the rage in rich countries, while in the South, western ideals are coveted by a monied few

PHILIPPE LIOTARD

PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTPELLIER I AND CO-FOUNDER OF THE MAGAZINE *QUASIMODO*

In 1976, the punks barged into the lives of the reserved British with a bang. Disrespect was their word of order, as they went about ranting against the predictable world mapped out by their elders. They insulted the Queen and heaped abuse on nuclear energy, the economy, pollution, work and the media.

For even greater shock value, they tapped the power of the image. They spat on staid English conventions by donning a revolting, yet carefully studied appearance. A skirt could no longer be called a skirt, and punks gleefully paraded in torn, stained and gaudy clothes, marrying colours against all the cannons of good taste. They cut their hair into crests, horns and other shapes, plastered themselves with lurid make-up and wore chains. They covered their arms, faces, necks and heads with tattoos, reinvented piercing using safety-pins, studs and rings in their noses, eyebrows, lips and cheeks, and went so far as to deliberately scar themselves.

With their altered, rebel bodies, the punks quickly gave birth to a charged self-image. Their very own promoters conspired with the media they despised and turned them into symbols of decadence, before exporting their bodily aesthetics throughout Europe, North America and Japan.

Now, a quarter of a century later, the punks have spawned a loyal following. Top models, sporting personalities, singers and show-business stars jostle to display original hairstyles and body piercings. In rich countries, teenage girls show off their navel rings and stick out their bejewelled tongues, while boys wear rings in their eyebrows. Twenty-five years on, the socially-scorned practices of piercing or altering one's body have become musts for counting on the fashion scene. Young westerners have appropriated once "underground" practices to gain entry into the trendy but ultimately mainstream club.

There is, however, a paradox in all this. One would expect originality and innovation. In fact, what we are witnessing is a sweeping trend of cultural mix and match, drawing on body-altering techniques long used by non-western cultures for purposes of religion, aesthetics or identity. The American artist Fakir Musafar coined the term "modern primitives," giving rise to a new ideal, a patchwork that "tribalizes" the western body. For the past 50 years, he has explored alternative forms of spirituality incorporating primitive body decoration and rituals.

How did these alternative ways of changing the body travel so far afield? What drives young westerners to have tattoos from the South Sea islands or Japan? What do these "tribal" or "primitive" markings and decorations mean in a western society?

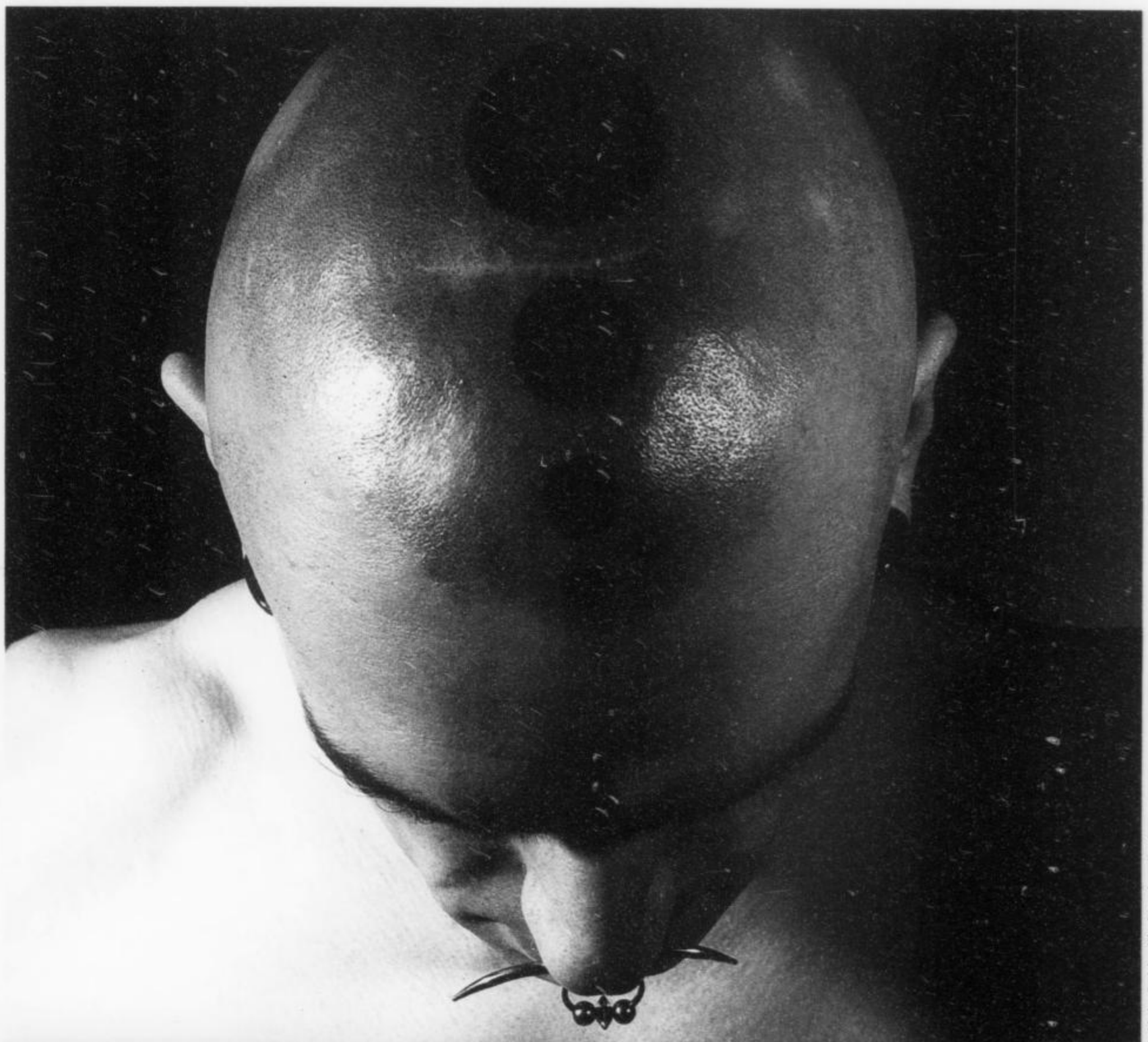
What do these "tribal" or "primitive" markings and decorations mean in a western society? What drives westerners to have tattoos from the South Sea islands?

Certainly not a return to the rituals that originally produced them: most of those who go for such adornments know nothing about these distant practices. Moreover, the bodies now being used as models were those that were stigmatized and displayed during colonial exhibitions in Europe and the United States right up to the early 20th century. They were curiosity objects and more significantly, living symbols of the supposed "backwardness" of the colonized peoples. Seen through European eyes, piercing, body scars and elongated lips, necks and ears were evidence of "barbarism," justifying the West's self-appointed duty to civilize. Such practices incarnated the opposite of the ideal "civilized" body.

By way of homage to the civilizations the colonial powers seemingly sought to stamp out, the vanguard of the "modern primitives" set out to investigate these body rituals. The "tribal aesthetics" of Maria Tashjian, who owns a chain of body-alteration shops in the United States, is vaunted as a way to educate people by preserving the memory of extinct cultures and passing on their idea of beauty. Through piercing, stretching the ear-lobe and body

scarring, we can thus create a jigsaw of ancient and modern aesthetics.

Others such as Musafar see these practices as the chance to work on one's own profound sense of Self. "Body play," in his words, consists of experimenting with every known body-alteration technique. By willingly going through the initiation ordeals of traditional societies, one actually relives a primal experience that has long been forgotten in the industrialized world. It is the path towards rediscovering an original innocence.



© Alain Soldeville/Rapho, Paris

A carefully studied statement that speaks out against convention.

Forget about those blonde surfers

What's important is not the markings left on the body, says Musafar. Instead, what matters is the confrontation with physical pain that takes one toward another plane of consciousness, shunned in western societies where all is done to combat suffering. But unlike the physical and symbolic violence of initiation rites in traditional societies, these bodily alterations are the fruit of a conscious personal choice.

Such discourse, however, will be rarely heard among the millions of people who flirt with body decorating. The vast majority are merely fulfilling the modern-day desire for self-knowledge and recognition from others. They might invoke aesthetics, spirituality, sex games or the desire to belong to a group, but whatever the reason, the process of altering the body and putting it to the test comes down to playing with identity. This reflects a profound cultural shift.

The urge to assert oneself goes hand in hand with a desire to challenge social norms and values, and to advocate different ways of experiencing, feeling and displaying one's body. Many fans of body-art, piercing and tattooing say they can no longer accept the western model of a sanitized, bland, alienated body.

The ideals of the blue-eyed blonde and the Californian surfer with the sleek and muscular bronzed body have to go. In this light, altering one's body becomes a battle against conventional appearance, a quest to give meaning to a life deemed otherwise insignificant. ▶

The mind's terror of the body has probably driven more men mad than ever could be counted.

D. H. Lawrence, British novelist (1885-1930)

To this end, it's not enough to go shopping for traditions. Piecing together a body can also be done using modern materials, knowledge and techniques. By inserting foreign objects under their skin, some body artists are creating protuberances on foreheads, breastbones and forearms to radically challenge age-old perceptions of the physical self.

A battle against creeping standardization

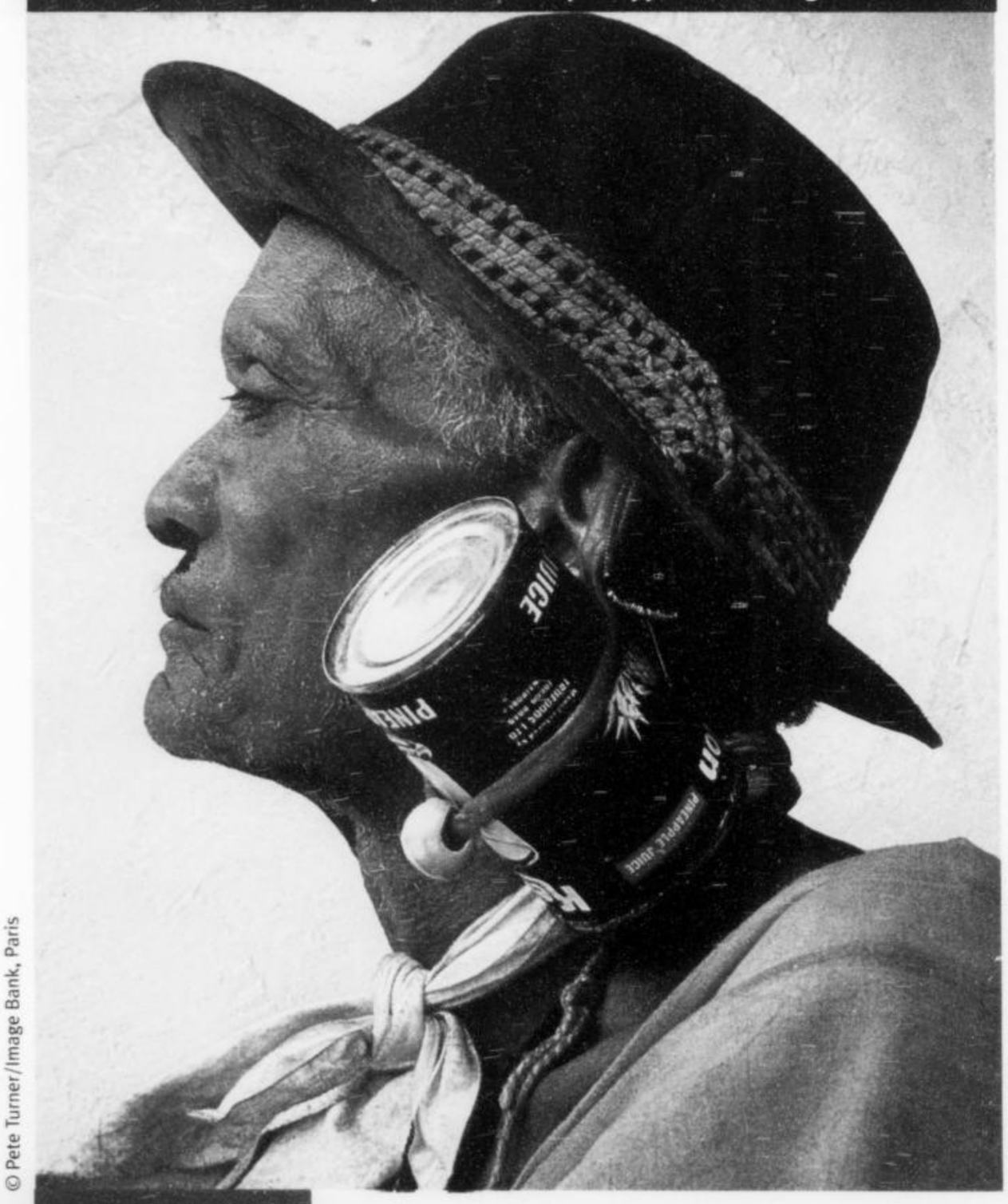
All these interventions can be seen as a quest to escape a destiny spelt out in terms of sex, age and social origin. In this sense, they have political implications. By shattering models, rejecting beauty standards circulated in the mass media and asserting the right to do, wear and display what they see fit, this avant-garde is holding up the body as one of the last bastions where individual freedom can be expressed.

Faced with the pressure to conform, to discipline one's body in order to meet economic and social demands, constructing an appearance becomes the royal road to upsetting normality. Everyone becomes an actor, capable of displaying their body in a unique way. Rather than sinking into the crowd, they spark a chain of reactions (grounded or not), from attraction and fascination to rejection and fear.

The refusal to comply with social norms, the awareness that looking different has an impact, is all part of a battle against creeping standardization. In this light, such a philosophy stands at opposite ends from the promise of cosmetic surgery, diets and the like.

Television and the Internet are giving play to all these trends. Day after day, we are exposed to a million ways of perceiving the body, culled from past and present, from the imagination and real experiments. Such depictions remind us that the body is not about a static anatomy, and that there is more than one way to signal membership to a group. They also remind us that culture is always on the move. What is exotic one day is undesirable the next and rediscovered later. The globalization of images has spawned multiple models of the "civilized" body, breaking with the western standard-bearer.

A Masai in Kenya shows off her pineapple can earring.



© Pete Turner/Image Bank, Paris

Dressed to kill in Kinshasa

In developing countries, however, those with money go to no ends to cling to the most common western model, plucked straight out of television soap-operas. South American immigrants in the United States go for breast implants, lighten their skin and bleach their hair. In southern Africa and among African Americans, skin-lighteners and hair-straightening products are all the rage. The famed *sapeurs* of Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, make enormous sacrifices to keep up with what they see as the latest in Parisian chic. Cosmetic surgery is as popular in the U.S. as in South America, where women have operations that bring them eerily close to the Barbie doll ideal. In Asia, they ask surgeons to attenuate the "slant" of their eyes.... Does a perceived or real context of political and economic domination lead some to hide their specific features? "Westernizing" the human body reads like a strategy to fit in with globalization.

For now, creating a hybrid ideal of the body is a game for the privileged. Among the poor, only a minority is going about removing the stigmas they have historically borne. But popularizing this new ideal is stirring debate. By hijacking appearance codes and adopting body-altering techniques that were originally designed for medical purposes, people are carving in flesh the rules of a new game. Their efforts will likely herald an all-round confusion over what norms, if any, govern the human body. ■

1. SHATTERED IDEALS

Advertising, my **mirror**

Christian Blachas, a seasoned observer of world advertising and publisher of the French magazine *Culturepubmag*, decodes the images of the body surrounding us

INTERVIEW BY CYNTHIA GUTTMAN

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

Has the spread of globalization produced an increasingly standardized ideal of the human body?

Oddly enough, the more globalization advances, the less of a single ideal there is. As far as pure physical beauty goes, the American model prevailed for several decades. It changed slowly, from brunettes like Audrey Hepburn and Lauren Bacall to blondes epitomized by Marilyn Monroe and others. Then various ethnic groups demanded their place in advertising. The result is that today, a wide range of human models is held up to us.

To what extent does advertising create people's image of the human body?

That image comes to us from the fashion world. People like to say advertising starts trends, like the recent wave of "fashion pornography." But this came straight from designers and fashion journalists. The job of advertising is to pick up on trends. It's rarely subversive because brands don't gain anything from shocking people too much. Advertising's a remarkable mirror, but it doesn't start fads.

So are the accusations unfair that advertising has created an ultra-thin ideal of the body, as personified by top model Kate Moss?

Kate Moss has certainly had a big influence on anorexic teenagers, but it isn't just because of advertising. It's her presence on the screen. Music, video clips and television are just as responsible as advertising for promoting this ideal of thinness.

The image of men has changed quite a lot too, hasn't it?

The depiction of homosexuals, especially in France, is a major revolution. Surveys show people aren't in the least shocked by the presence of homosexuals in advertising images. All this has helped to win acceptance for the idea that a man has the right to take care of his body. Sales of male beauty products are booming. Men are trying to find their bearings. Their three reasons for being, in the West at least—going to war, bringing home the bacon and making babies —are disappearing as more women work and science advances. Men have mentally accepted that they should do housework (though only three percent actually do any) and help to look after their children. But women are also calling for men to be more masculine again, while demanding they show a sensitive, feminine side…

Advertising reflects this confusion.

Absolutely. France is the country that seems to have the freest attitude by far to morals and morality. The Anglo-Saxons are very prudish. You never see naked breasts in American ads. Three years ago, there was an uproar when the lingerie firm Victoria's Secret mounted a big advertising campaign in the United States, complete with parades by top models. It was the first time people had seen women moving in public wearing nothing but a bra and panties. We'd been seeing that on French television for 20 years.

Has that image become routine?

Yes, and we're not bothered by it. A recent survey we conducted showed that most French people aren't shocked when they see very sex-oriented advertising. Scandinavian countries have even less of a complex with regard to nudity, although the images are not erotic. They are very puritanical Protestant societies.

In France, a law has been suggested to safeguard the image of women in advertising.

Some feminist groups deplore excessively sexual advertising and the depiction of women as objects, but I think it's dangerous to pass laws about that. Who's going to decide what's what? It's not up to judges to say whether an ad is degrading to women. People will eventually get bored with very sexual images and a balance will be restored naturally.

Are there any taboos left in the way the human body is depicted?

The last taboos, thankfully, are pedophilia and zoophilia. The trend of portraying sado-masochism shocks feminists but at the same time, advertising works with fantasies. If there's no physical threat to the human body, such allusions can't go very far. ■

To love or hate your body are two mistakes to avoid. Narcissism and self-hate, money and suicide are of the same substance.

Philippe Sollers, French writer (1936-)

1. SHATTERED IDEALS

In and **out** of slavery

Do artists uphold prejudice or offer a novel way of looking at ourselves? A few hints culled from the colonial era and beyond give a sense of how art goes about telling the body's history

NICHOLAS MIRZOEFF

PROFESSOR OF ART AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES AT THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK, NEW YORK. HIS MANY PUBLICATIONS INCLUDE *DIASPORA AND VISUAL CULTURE: REPRESENTING AFRICANS AND JEWS* (ROUTLEDGE, 2000)

When visual artists represent the body, whose body is being talked about, and can that body stand for others or only for itself? It would be comforting to tell a story in which people from the past misused the body, only for more enlightened figures from our own time to set the record straight. Like most stories with a happy ending, this would be just a story. History is more complicated and less reassuring. In trying to think about a history of bodies, it is necessary to highlight certain themes because the body is in a sense everything: medicine, war, sexuality, "race," gender, performance, dance and so on. On the other hand, the body can be treated as nothing, or as a commodity, that is to say, something that is bought and sold in slavery.

Slavery has been defined as "social death." If humans are, in Aristotle's phrase, "social animals," then to be a slave is to be defined by others as simply a body, a dead person who works. By looking at the changing depictions of the body in and out of slavery, we get a measure of how our own bodies have been evaluated over time.

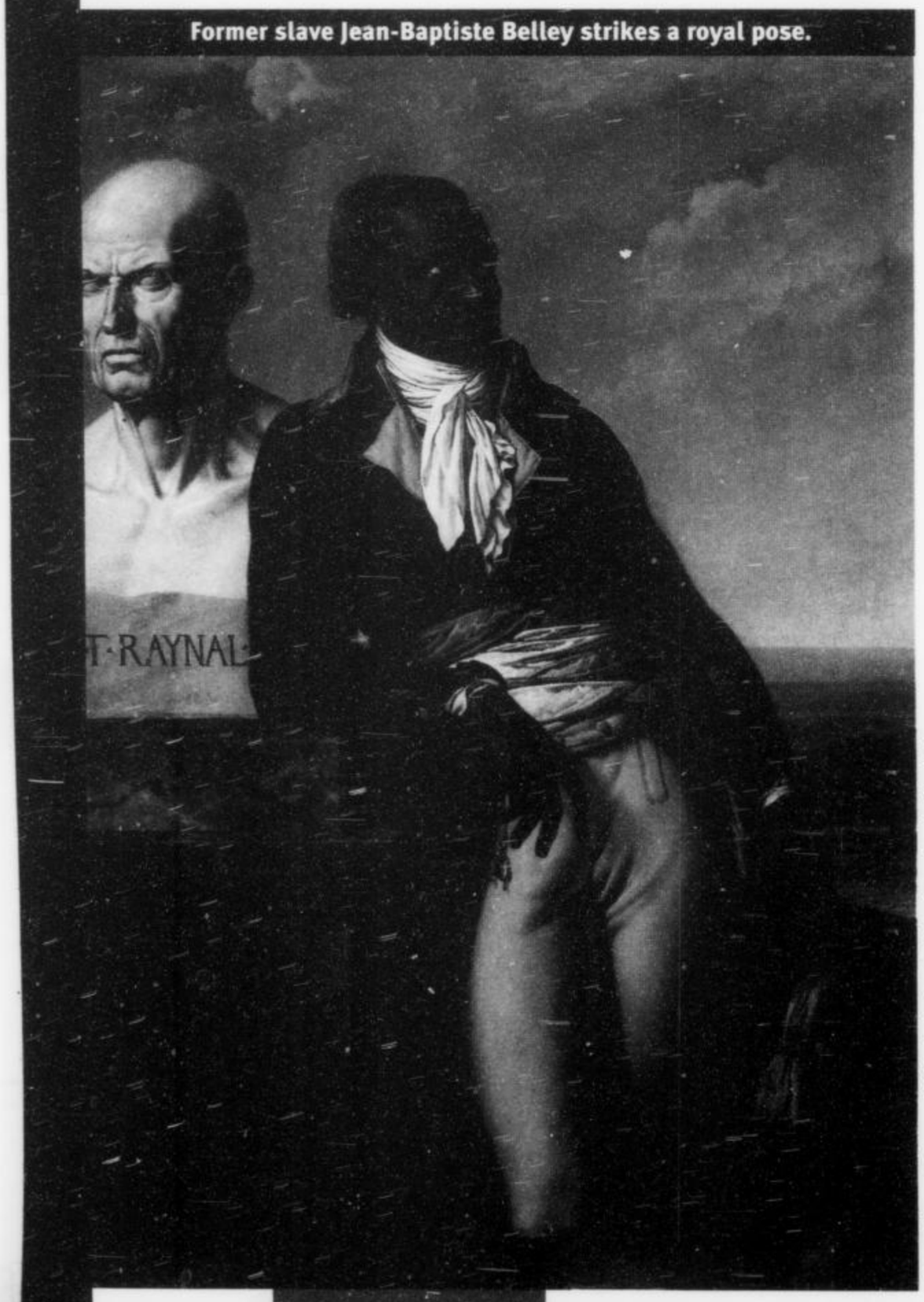
Some might think that this is a "politically correct" topic, detracting from the impact of art. The reverse can also be argued: a failure to understand the social and historical context in which artworks were made reduces them to mere decorations. It is precisely because art is so powerful that we need to understand more about how it works. To take an example, the brand-new Sainsbury gallery for African art in the British Museum, London, places the entire continent in three galleries divided only by medium—sculpture, fabrics, pottery. Here self-confident and highly realistic 16th-century bronze sculptures from the powerful kingdom of Benin stand alongside the tormented abstract *minkisi* power figures from the Belgian Congo, as if both expressed something about an eternal Africa. In fact the Benin bronzes show so powerfully what Africa was capable of before slavery and colonization that 19th-century Europeans assumed that they could not have been made by Africans and theorized that perhaps refugees from the lost city of Atlantis had been responsible.

The Cartesian heritage

The *minkisi* figures were made at the height of the colonial terror in the Belgian Congo and were used by a *nganga*, or operator, to call on the spirits of the ancestors in the struggle against colonization. If this seems to be evidence of a supposed African "primitivism," it should be noted that the Belgian colonizers believed that the power figures worked and did everything they could to capture them, with the result that many American and European museums have fine examples. By trying to place these figures into grand, abstract categories like art, or even Africa, the curators missed the chance to show how art tells the history of the body as one of conflict and change.

The modern Western history of the body usually begins with the separation by French philosopher René Descartes of mind and body. Writing in the mid-17th century, Descartes argued that the body was only connected to the mind at the pineal gland—which in fact produces hormones in response to light—that became a point of interface between two radically separate entities. In his view, the body simply responded to the environment and to sense perceptions, whereas the mind reflected on those perceptions and took decisions that might or might not agree with them. For example, the eye sees a perspective drawing as "real," while the mind knows it is an illusion. By introducing doubt, Descartes broke the

Former slave Jean-Baptiste Belley strikes a royal pose.



© Versailles et Trianon/RMN, Paris (portrait by Anne-Louis Girodet)

traditional continuum between mind and body that saw both as natural and asserted a higher status for the mind. Perhaps the body was something that the European elite wished to distance itself from, now that the trade in human beings across the Atlantic was in full swing.

The French port of Nantes sent out 108 slavers to the Guinea coast as early as 1666, taking on board 37,340 Africans. Slavery in the French colonies was controlled by the infamous *Code Noir* decreed by Louis XIV. This separate legal code for the enslaved gave the slave owner the same kind of power on his plantation that the king enjoyed nationally—that is to say, the power of life and death. The king's body was uniquely powerful, especially as depicted in art. For the king was held to have two bodies, one physical and one spiritual. The spiritual body was the essence of the monarchy that never died, slept or became ill. That body was shown in portraits and statues around the nation and the French colonies. By the same token, the bodies of the king's subjects were mere objects, whether that of a French peasant or a colonial slave. So the philosophical division of the person into body and soul was complicated by the political doubling of the royal body and haunted by the ghosts of the enslaved.

© From the Collection at Royal Holloway/University of London

Edwin Long's *Babylonian Marriage Market* (1875), a cornucopia of stereotypes.

Race takes the stage

During the French Revolution of 1789, these tensions burst into the open. At that time Santo Domingo (now Haiti), the jewel in the French colonial crown, received 1,587 ships, more than France's largest port, Marseilles. But beginning in 1791, Haiti's enslaved Africans joined the revolution and overthrew the colonial regime. As the revolution thought through the consequences of the Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) and the abolition of the monarchy (1792), it became clear that slavery would have to go. On February 3, 1794, a group of Haitian delegates to the Convention, the revolutionary parliament, successfully proposed the abolition of slavery. One of these men was Jean-Baptiste Belley, a former slave who had been born in West Africa. In 1797, the artist Anne-Louis Girodet painted Belley's portrait. It is a remarkable evocation of the tensions of the period expressed through one person's body.

Belley stands against a tropical landscape, wearing the uniform of a Convention member. His face is rendered in the traditional three-quarter style used for nobles and monarchs. At the same time, his body has an unusual twist to the hips, giving it a somewhat feminine feel. His masculinity is nonetheless asserted by a prominent bulge in his trousers.

Belley rests on a bust of the abbé Raynal, who had called for the abolition of slavery. The marble whiteness of the bust and its classical straight forehead contrast with Belley's dark skin and a prominently sloped forehead. In the period, this cranial angle, as it was called, was taken as a mark of low intelligence. How should this portrait be understood? The simple fact that an African was painted in the royal style by a European artist marks a remarkable shift, while the various markers placed on his body by the artist tried to assert a new form of superiority: that of race.

Revisiting *The Jungle Book*

Ironically the very success of the movement to abolish the Atlantic slave trade engendered a new form of distinguishing between human bodies as belonging to different races. Under slavery people were legally different. Now a new means of classifying human bodies was devised. An extraordinary volume of scientific and artistic work was produced in the effort to define and make visible the supposed eternal differences of race. Everything from skin colour to the shape of the skull, nose and breasts, and every aspect of culture was used as evidence to ▶

Unlike ugliness, beauty cannot really be explained: it is stated, affirmed and repeated in every part of the body, but can never be described.

Roland Barthes, French semiologist (1915-1980)

prove that humans were biologically distinct. Art played an important role in the system, from supplying evidence of difference in the comparison of Greek statues to African bodies to instructing young people how to make race visible in images. While many radical artists were involved in the struggles to abolish slavery, they were exceptions to the mainstream rule.

The highest price paid for the work of any artist in the 19th century was for Edwin Long's 1875 *The Babylonian Marriage Market*. This painting showed a slave auction in antiquity, with authentic historical detail. In the foreground, facing the viewer, was a racialized hierarchy of enslaved women ranging from a white woman at left who looks at herself confidently in a mirror via Asian women to an African woman who covers her face in apparent shame. The main action of the scene showed a woman being unclothed on the slave block to the appreciative gaze of a male audience, who appear to be mostly Jewish. This cornucopia of stereotypes won Long a position in Britain's Royal Academy and a career as a portrayer of the "types" that science then assured everyone to be real.

© Stephen White, Friedman Gallery, London

A twist on Victorian ball-gowns by Nigeria's Yinka Shonibare.

In the present, race is a term whose very meaning is uncertain. Scientists have shown that all humans share 99.9 percent of their genes and the visible markers of the body are minor variations of no substantive importance. But racism has not gone away as the recent wave of hostility to outsiders in Western Europe clearly shows. In part that is because race is no longer understood as it was in the 19th century as science but as part of popular culture.

One of the first feature films was D.W. Griffith's 1916 epic *Birth of a Nation* that tells the story of the rise of Ku Klux Klan in the American South, using white actors in black face to portray African Americans in atrocious stereotypes. Throughout the 20th century, films like *Tarzan of the Apes* presented Africans as primitive savages. When such subjects were challenged by the civil rights movement and decolonization, they were simply displaced to cartoons like *The Jungle Book* (1966) that portrays jazz as literally the music of monkeys.

A new generation of artists is challenging us once again to rethink old means of imagining ourselves and others. The controversial young African American artist Kara Walker has challenged the prevailing assumption that all images of minorities in the United States should show people engaged in positive and uplifting activities. By contrast, her silhouette figures cut out of black paper show both Africans and Europeans in an extraordinary range of what might be called perverse activities.

By using the 19th-century silhouette format once taught to polite Victorian ladies, Walker at once reminds us that the leisure of such women was enabled by the free or unfree labour of others and suggests that not that much has changed since then. Her work makes us realize that oppression really functions to denature both the oppressor and the oppressed. While some critics have fiercely denounced her work, Walker has already won a MacArthur "genius" grant.

Another contemporary artist who sees the Victorian past in the present is Nigerian Yinka Shonibare, who recreates elaborate ball-gowns of the period, correct in every detail, except that the fabrics he uses are West African kente cloth, not the sedate cottons and silks that Europeans of the period once wore. These dresses make colour in all senses of the term visible. In similar vein, the Japanese photographer Yosimasa Morimura photographs himself in a variety of staged situations, often wearing drag. Posing as the model for Manet's 1865 painting *Olympia*, Morimura completely alters the dynamic of the image. Whereas the original showed a white prostitute, whose sexuality was alluded to via the figure of her African maid, the photographic recreation forces us to reconsider the question of what whiteness might actually be.

Throughout the 20th century, films like *Tarzan of the Apes* presented Africans as primitive savages.

All these artists take the long view. They seem to suggest that despite the advances of recent decades, the historical legacy of slavery and colonialism is far from played out. At the same time, the very fact that artists from around the world are engaging in such a reevaluation of history is itself grounds for a degree of hope. One thing is certain: the body is going to be a key subject in art for a long time to come. ■

1. SHATTERED IDEALS

The Media Foundation, an Indian NGO, has found a new vocation for the sculptures of the Khajuraho temples.

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India's **wings of desire**

Hindu civilization glorified the sensual body and gave the world a famed treatise of physical love. While the advent of Aids was first met with intolerance, traditional practices are regaining right of place

SHREEDHAR RAJAN

AWARD-WINNING INDIAN FILMMAKER WHO HAS PUBLISHED EXTENSIVELY ON THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF AIDS

Koovagam, in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, has attracted the limelight in recent years—thanks to Aids. The village is the traditional seat of *chitirai pournami*, an ancient transsexual festival marking the anniversary when Lord Krishna is believed to have taken on the form of a maiden to enjoy sexual bliss with Aravan, a Pandava prince.

For centuries, the festival has been celebrated on a full moon day in April and is patronized by urban and rural folk and *hijras* (transsexuals and eunuchs) from across India. In the last three years, Aids prevention organizations from Chennai have stepped in to confer "new respectability" to this expression of alternate sexuality by organizing an annual beauty contest for the "third gender." "We want people to realize that *hijras* are as much a part of society as anyone else, and use the opportunity to provide Aids information and condoms," says Dr. Manorama Pinagapany, director of a community health NGO.

While the local media has become more daring about promoting "new lifestyles," Indians are generally considered "conservative and orthodox" in sexual matters. There is an irony in this: it was after all in countries like India that various sexual cultures claimed their natural place in society from time immemorial.

Hindu culture views the physical body as a container of the soul, a divine but transient abode of the spirit. The body is revered because it houses the Self, the life-force. The *Kama Sutra*, the ancient Hindu treatise on sex by Vatsyayana, notes that *kama* (sexual desire) is one of the means to attain *moksha* (salvation). These primeval thoughts still pulsate through the subcontinent. The *Shivalinga*, a phallic symbol of the deity Shiva in sexual union with his consort, goddess Parvati, is worshipped all over India. Lord Rama and his wife Seetha may be glorified for their sense of duty and fidelity, but India is also the land of Krishna, celebrated for his dalliances with celestial beauties.

Temple sculptures of Hindu deities seek neither to conceal any body parts nor even censor their proportions. Depictions of Hindu gods and goddesses are usually of graceful, sensual proportions, the men long limbed and athletic, the women with slim waists and ful-

Just as, in this body, the Self passes through childhood, youth and old age, so after death, it passes to another body.

From the Bhagavad-Gita, *ancient epic poem*

some bodies. Stone figurines of divinities and mortals at the 10th century Khajuraho temples in Madhya Pradesh depict a variety of sexual unions, almost in clinical fashion.

The unabashed honesty of the nudity that embellishes almost every Hindu temple divests the body of crude eroticism, raising it to a near ethereal plane in Hindu consciousness. The average Hindu was conditioned to accept the body and sexuality as natural aspects of the cycle of birth and death.

Cultures driven underground

Sexual openness was an ordinary aspect of everyday life, as temples also served as centres for social interaction. An assortment of sexual orientations were an integral part of traditional Hindu societies. Transsexual courtesans, dancers of the *devadasi* tradition, street dancers, singers and musicians offered pleasure and sensual fulfillment. Multiple partner sex, bisexuality and other so-called sexually "deviant" cultures were never explicitly disowned but instead, had their own social, religious and artistic space within mainstream society.

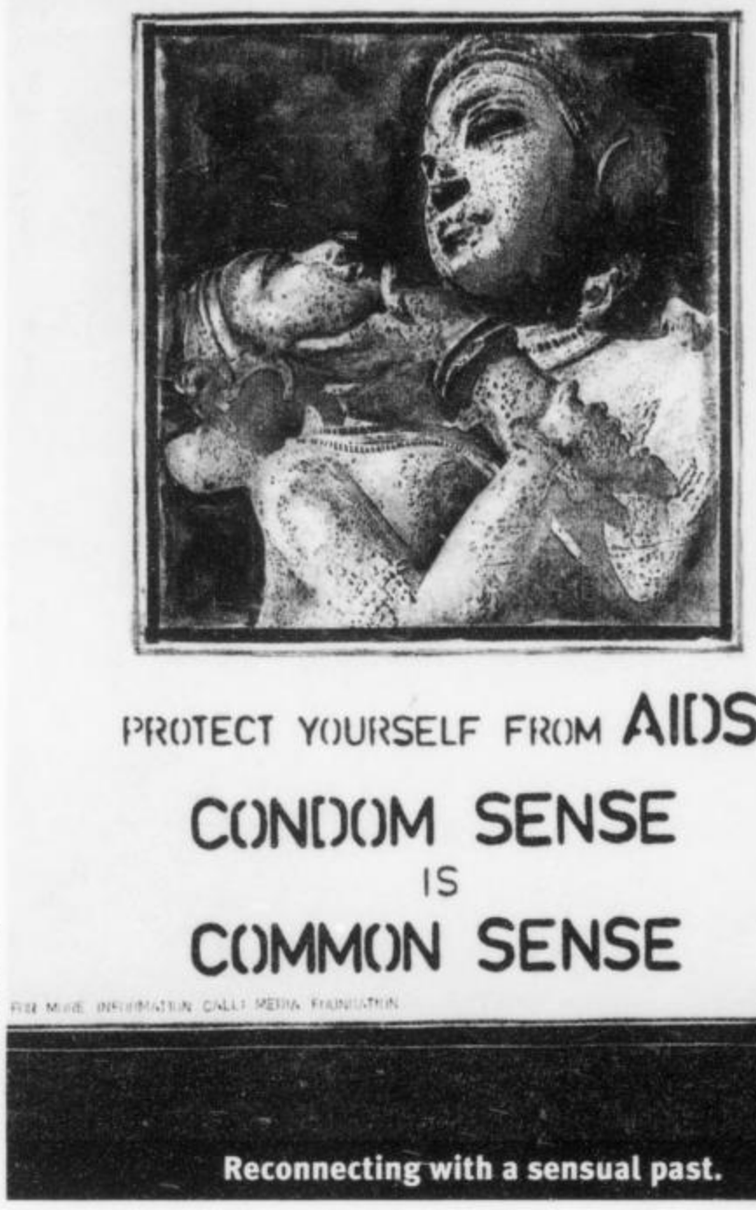
Sex work, for example was conferred religious respectability in the culture of the *devadasi* sect. These women were given in marriage to God and ritualistically dedicated themselves to fulfilling the sexual needs of society. They lived in or around the temples and enjoyed considerable respect.

Indian civilization allowed for a diversity of perceptions, lifestyles and values to the extreme and was non-judgemental almost to a fault. Yet there appears to have been a method to this madness: complex social and spiritual systems had evolved, allowing for a certain unity in diversity, a harmonious coexistence.

Hindu cultures came under pressure from Buddhist and Jain teachings that advocated physical and sexual renunciation. During the Mughal rule of the subcontinent (1556-1707), sexuality was put under *purdah* (veil) and women further withdrew from the public domain. Colonization by the British and subsequent missionary efforts at "civilizing" the sexually "exotic natives" deepened the departure from uninhibited sexual mores. Victorian prudery and double standards were added to this conundrum. Indian sexuality, which had enjoyed abundant expression in the public domain for centuries, suddenly found itself choked. Caught between many worlds, its natural growth became warped: hypocrisy, denial of one's roots and the self, fueled by a sense of shame, began to gain momentum. Aping the culture of the colonizers to gratify them led to a situation where traditions were disowned.

The year 1947 saw the birth of an independent India. The spawning of an English-speaking, westernized Indian minority, which had internalized many of Britain's missionary values, now ruled as the country's political elite, setting new moral standards, codifying what kinds of sex and between whom was permissible by law. The *devadasi* tradition, for instance, was criminalized and legally banned.

The upshot was a burgeoning culture of clandestine sexuality, lurking in respectable neighbourhoods, the dark by-lanes of towns and the deserted corridors of temples. It was into such an environment of sexual hypocrisy and repression that the HIV virus made its unfettered entry.



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Reconnecting with a sensual past.

A foreigner's disease

When the first cases of infection were detected in India, the government responded by passing an HIV quarantine law. The illness was perceived as a foreigner's disease from the "immoral and excessively permissive" West. Some government officials called for the repatriation of African students and a ban on sex with foreigners. The government also made public appeals for a return to the nation's "pristine" values, offered to pay sex workers to retire, or at least to tattoo HIV-positive ones to forewarn clients.

The world is now twenty years into the Aids experience, with Asia stealing the spotlight during the second decade. Until it was recently overtaken by South Africa, India had the largest HIV positive population in the world—about 3.86 million. Available reports indicate that the epidemic remains concentrated among groups like sex workers and drug users. By the mid-1990s, more than 25 percent of sex workers in Indian cities had tested positive for HIV. In Mumbai, the prevalence rate among them had reached 71 percent in 1997. Interviews with HIV-positive women in India revealed that despite public information campaigns, women only learned about the importance of

I hold flesh-food to be unsuited to our species. We err in copying the lower animal world—if we are superior to it.

Mahatma Gandhi, Indian politician and philosopher (1869-1948)

condom use after they had become infected. While gender inequality can be fatal as far as Aids is concerned, the reality in several Asian countries is that women remain largely uneducated and exploited at home and in the fields. They know little about protecting themselves from HIV, or negotiating condom use with their husbands or sexual partners.

Sex workers in the open

But there is another side to the coin: Aids has been the single most significant factor that helped traditional sexual practices and orientations to at least partially regain their rightful place in the public domain. Ironically, this too is the result of international pressures. Prostitution and homosexuality, it now turns out, must be de-criminalized and women given the right to safer sex in the age of Aids. Sexuality must now be redeemed from its underground sanctuary. People of different sexual orientations must be rehabilitated into mainstream society, destigmatized and even re-christened. With the arrival of Aids, the circle is complete, and the *devadasi* has re-emerged in her new avatar of "sex-worker."

Sex education is donor-driven, funded and fashionable. Sex is not a dirty word any more, just like the good old days, centuries ago, when we took our children to the temples where the most graphic details of all forms of sexual practices were aesthetically signified in stone, where grandmothers told tales to their grandchildren about sexuality with utmost reverence. The difference in this era of Aids is, having come the full circle, we sadly discover that we have lost the natural ease, grace and élan that came spontaneously in the distant past. There is a visible self consciousness attached to public perception and expressions of the human body.

After more than a decade of Aids, the sheer magnitude of the threat to human lives is finally blowing away the layers of hypocrisy and painting a brave new assertive face on Indian sexuality and the body. Calcutta, which has Asia's largest red light district, Sonagachi, is home to the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee —a forum of 60,000 sex workers and their children.

The founding members, all sex workers, came together through their active involvement as peer educators in an STD/HIV prevention intervention programme. "We have been successfully networking among sex workers in India and some other countries, particularly in South and Southeast Asia, to promote and protect our rights," claims the forum's spokesperson. "Our political objectives are decriminalization of adult prostitution and securing social recognition of sex work as a valid profession "

How has the literate middle class and the polity responded to the Aids epidemic? According to psychoanalyst and author Dr. Sudhir Kakar, "sexual attitudes have changed much less than what the media portrays. Sexuality is still not seen as freedom of the psyche and body. It is still surrounded by feelings of shame and guilt." Although middle class women have become more vocally aware of their bodies, says Kakar, sexuality can be very subversive for family stability. "One believes that for family stability one has to be sexually conservative." The deep bonding within Indian families is ensuring that people with Aids are largely not being left to their own devices, although a husband with the illness is more likely to be looked after by his family than his wife.

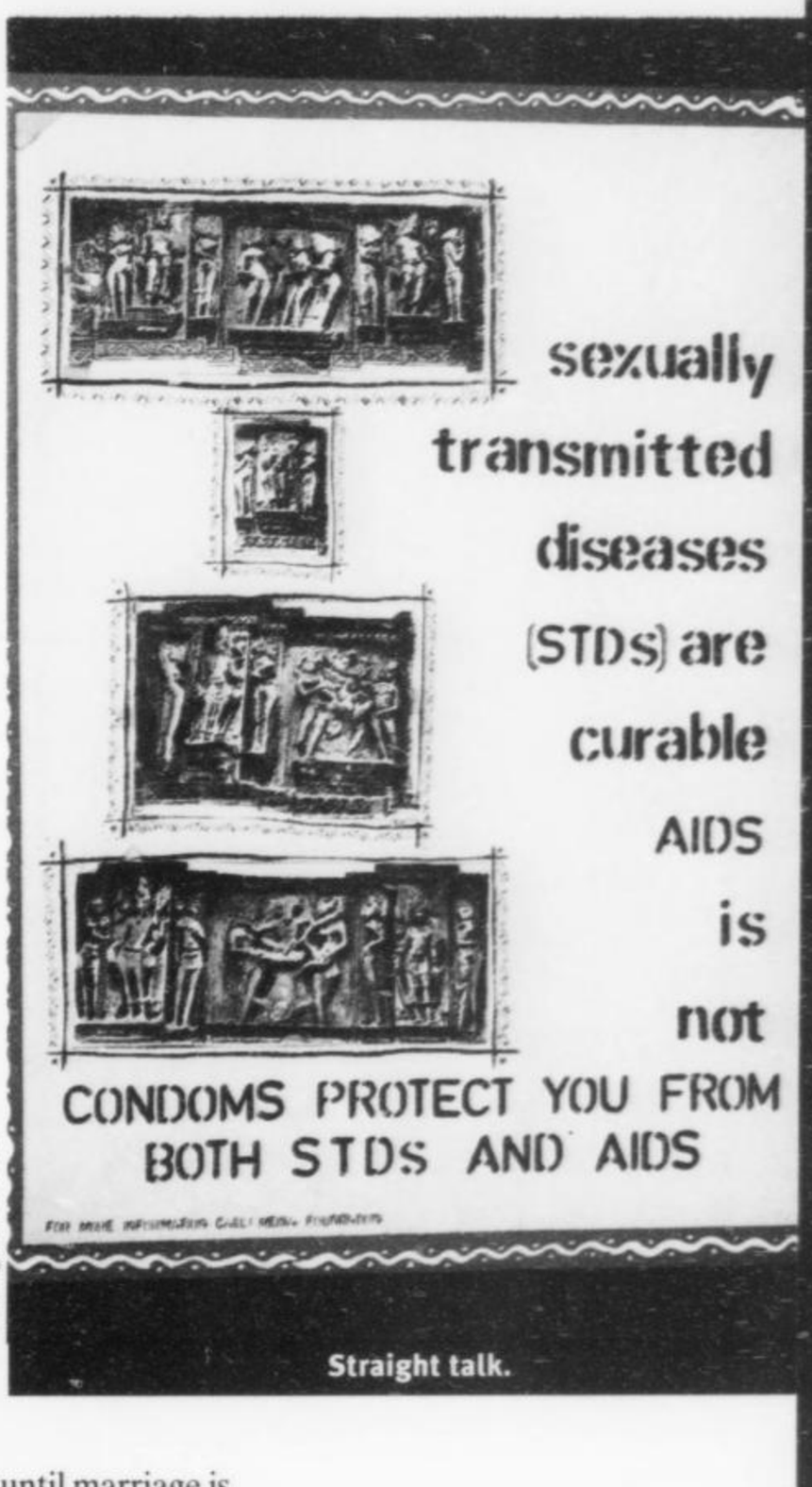
People with HIV, irrespective of caste or class, are subjected to considerable social ostracism. The stigma can go to extremes: in 1989, a young HIV-positive man in Goa was isolated and incarcerated for having a "contagion that was dangerous to public health." A decade later, a man rumoured to be infected with HIV and supposedly attacking residents of a Chennai suburb with a needle contaminated with his own blood, led to a hysterical mob burning him alive.

Sitcoms vs morality

Even explicit HIV prevention education attracted censors in some Indian states. In June 2000, two members of an Aids Service Organization working in a village in northern India were arrested and jailed for having distributed graphically explicit material on HIV prevention. The couple had to remain in custody on charges that they had attempted to corrupt the morals of society under the guise of Aids education. A year later, women in Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh), publicly burnt HIV prevention leaflets containing graphic depictions of how to use condoms, spurred on by a sense of moral outrage.

With the opening up of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, American television serials regularly flood urban middle-class drawing rooms with sex and seminudity. Sexual talk is in vogue among young, mostly urban Indians, but the emphasis on virginity until marriage is still the norm, says Kakar, especially among women

Modernity and traditions are colliding under the onslaught of globalization. Primordial beliefs, values and norms are now awash with science, technology and westernization. Perceptions of the body and sexuality are less self-conscious and the wheel seems to have come full circle. ■



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2. PASSING RITES

The **sirens** of Tokyo

The outrageously eccentric young women of Tokyo's trendy neighbourhoods use their bodies as a provocation, simply to attain the illusion of being loved

MURIEL JOLIVET

PH.D. IN ASIAN STUDIES, PROFESSOR AT SOPHIA UNIVERSITY IN TOKYO, AUTHOR OF *HOMO JAPONICUS* (PHILIPPE PICQUIER, ARLES, 2000).

© Tom Jacobi/Stern/Studio X, La Bernerie

It all started in 1996 with Amuro Namie, a superb, 17-year-old siren and graduate of Okinawa's Actor's School. An excellent dancer, she performed on stage in a strapless bra and then in a pant suit with long jackets. Her look—golden skin, mother-of-pearl hair and carefully tweezed eyebrows—immediately became all the rage, launching the "tropical" style. Amuro Namie also introduced the vogue of "platform boots," which she even wore in the middle of summer to make up for her short stature.

Her clones have multiplied like mushrooms after a rainstorm in Tokyo's trendy neighbourhoods, like Shibuya. *Hiyake* tanning salons have cropped up just about everywhere, and young women who have overdone it—or fallen asleep under the UV rays—are called *ganguro*, "black faces." They find a mischievous pleasure in accentuating the contrasts by highlighting their eyes and lips in white.

"I went through my *kogyaru* [literally, 'little girl'[1]] phase," says Sanae, a 21-year-old student, "my teachers just about pushed me into it. When they let me know that they couldn't stand me anymore—that I would never make it in their eyes—I realized it was no longer worth wearing myself out trying to please them. To get out of my teenage crisis, I hung out with a group of girls, between 15 and 18, who were as lost as me. Some of them were 'occasionals' who turned tricks to buy clothes or name-brand handbags without the least bit of remorse. They clung to the illusion that they were envied."

Writer Murakami Ryu[2] thinks that high school prostitution is the sign of a much wider malaise in Japan. To him, young "occasionals" are just trying to act like adults by sacrificing themselves to the ritual of consumption. After all, aren't the Japanese the world's leading consumers of designer Louis Vuitton bags? "These young people cling to their mobile phones like a life raft to give themselves the illusion of being loved," he says. "In reality, they're terribly lonely. Each girl is in her bubble, incapable of communicating."

The *kogyaru* of the late 1990s vanished as quickly as they appeared. Men now find them vulgar, and nobody seems to miss them. In Shibuya, they have been replaced by superb creatures on stilts, their pants held up by garters that offer a glimpse of legs molded by red fishnet stockings. Clothes are just an excuse. Hanging out in Shibuya mostly means wandering around in search of an identity, or at least a visual one. What began as a very affected anti-conformism has ended up becoming a new way of fitting into the standard mould. You cannot tell one Shibuya girl from another. Their password remains *mureru*, "meeting in groups to share," if not the same philosophy of life, at least the same eccentricity or the courage to exhibit part of their bodies.

Until the 1970s or 1980s, no self-respecting woman ever went out with bare arms, much less uncovered legs or feet.

Until the 1970s and 80s, no self-respecting woman ever went out with bare arms, much less uncovered legs or feet. Sleeves were mandatory and going bare-legged was out of the question, even during the hottest months of the year. The measure of how much a woman in a *kimono* cared about her appearance was the cleanliness of her *tabi* (linen socks worn with sandals or wooden clogs), which she discreetly changed during the course of the day to always look impeccable.

Today's young women are just as conscious and strict about their appearance but display it in other ways. They walk around bare-legged, bare-backed and barefoot in spangled mules and plunging necklines. They wear carefully polished fingernails (real or false, they are incredibly long) and false eyelashes, their bodies burned to a crisp by UV rays and their hair dyed blond or bleached.

The Shibuya generation, the heir to the "bamboo shoots" generation (*takenoko zoku*) of the 1970s and 80s, is so eccentric they would make

Tokyo's fashion victims seldom travel on their own.

© Tom Jacobi/Stern/Studio X, La Bernerie

London's former punks blush. "The plasticity of Japanese women's bodies lets them change their look whenever they feel like it," says Erika, a 17-year-old French-Japanese high school student. "They can be black or white. For an African look, they overdo it in the tanning salons, wear clothes with leopard designs, have their hair kinked and permed and use make-up with an emphasis on brown pastels and white reflections. If they want to look white, like the singer Hamazaki Ayumi, they cultivate a pale look, bleach their hair, put on false eyelashes and sometimes even wear blue contact lenses or sunglasses."

At twenty, the fun stops

To obtain a *kogao,* or "little face," there is an endless range of products, from sauna masks to creams. The hard part is maintaining the iron discipline necessary to stay slim as a reed, with a narrow waist and spaghetti legs. "Anorexia has been taking a heavy toll since the 1980s," says psychiatrist Saitô Satoru, who is the author of a book entitled *Onnarashisa no yamai* (*The Pain of Femininity*). "Over 60 percent of young women today are underweight."

That's because being beautiful in Japan means being young, *very* young. The singers in Morning Musume, a real hit, are between 12 and 20 years old. The senior member (called "the old lady"!) just quit the band at the age of 28. Amuro Namie was a star when she was 18. Today, she has practically disappeared.

Why then do these girls go through so much trouble for their look? They do it more for themselves than to attract attention from boys. To have fun and show off. But showing off implies the presence of an audience likely to admire them, or at least appreciate all their efforts. The blond sirens in Shibuya know that their daring outfits are less shocking when they walk around in groups, as if to give themselves the courage to face disapproving stares. In any case, they don't stand a chance of getting through the high school door with their look. Education is a serious business, and all the more so when university begins.

A rich man is hard to find

"The student style has nothing to do with the *kogyaru* style," says Chikako, a third-year student who works for the magazine *Can Can*. "Our readers, who are between 18 and 23, are looking for smart, resourceful men who make a good living and spend their money like water. The guys these girls want to meet most graduated from the top universities. They work in business, advertising or for a famous foreign company, unless they're future doctors. Since the speculative bubble burst and economic growth came to a screeching halt in the early 1990s, the student style has become much more toned down. Girls used to own several name-brand bags, now they settle for just one. They spend more on their hair than on their clothes. All of them want dirty blond hair. It's gotten to the point where girls with black hair are a minority in university lecture halls!"

After graduation, they reappear in preppy suits, white blouses buttoned up to the neck and flat-heeled shoes, like perfect office ladies. At 30, they drop their boyfriends for somebody more serious and hard-working who will help them fulfill their role as mother and do all they can to put their children on the path to a bright future.

So much conformism is almost enough to make one yearn for the days when the *kogyaru* gave free rein to their fantasies. ■

1. *From the Japanese* ko, *little, and the English* girl *pronounced with a Japanese accent.*
2. *Author of* Coin Locker Babies *(Kodansha, 1995)*

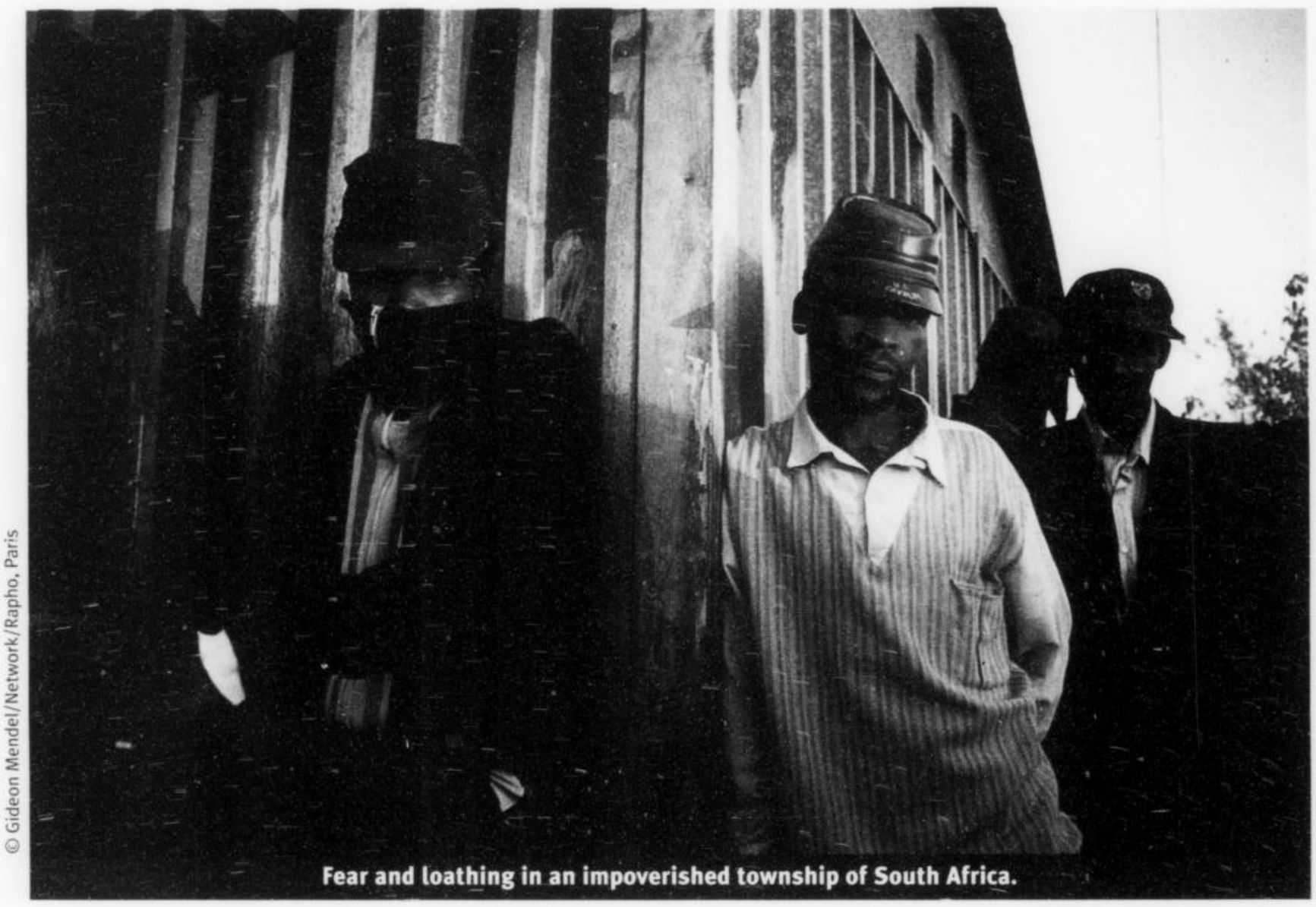
2. PASSING RITES

The rise and fall of the South African "six-pack"

Yesteryear's heroes are now villains in South Africa, where former guerrillas pushed to the fringes of society cling to the cult of the hard body

THOKOZANI XABA

Research fellow at the University of Natal, South Africa



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Fear and loathing in an impoverished township of South Africa.

I had just moved back to Kwamashu (near Durban, South Africa) when I went to meet the son of a friend, who had been like a brother to me before his untimely death. It had been ten years since I had last seen Fernando. The 11-year-old boy had grown into a tall young man, who, despite his size, greeted me obsequiously.

"Uncle! I was afraid you wouldn't recognize me." "I was unsure at first, but I couldn't miss the resemblance between you and your father." The mention of his father made Fernando jolt. "You should tell me about my old man sometime," he said sadly.

When we parted, I couldn't help noticing the number of people staring at us. Later, I found out that they had never seen Fernando talk with anyone but former guerrillas or comrades who put their bodies "on the line" in the struggle against apartheid. Some thought that he was holding me up.

In the following year, I met Fernando about a dozen times. We mostly just greeted each other but once he asked me to loan him a few coins. Was he looking for a job? "I can't," he said. "I don't have ID papers." Did he want me to speak with the authorities? "No," he said. "The police are looking for me."

A few months later, Fernando was dead. A neighbour explained that the police had killed him in his safe house. "Get up, you're arrested!" they'd yelled at his friends. But when Fernando tried to stand up, a bullet went through his forehead, another through his cheekbone and five or so riddled his body. The officers then found a cache of arms in the house—some of which had belonged to policemen who had been robbed and killed.

Fernando's story is not unique. Unable to find a job, he began training former guerrillas to protect themselves from police attacks because many had turned to crime. Some robbed banks, others turned to contract murders. They replenished their stocks of arms by attacking police. But there was one taboo: they did not attack their neighbours. They eliminated those who preyed on the community. One man captured the feel-

ings of many when he mourned Fernando's passing, "We have lost a hero..."

Scarred egos

Like in many transitional societies, yesteryears' heroes—the young guerrillas and comrades who sacrificed their studies and often their lives under the banner "Liberation now, education later!"—are today's villains in South Africa. The "real" man is no longer the militant, anti-authority warrior, but the law-abiding, wage-earning professional or artisan.

In a world of globalized advertising, the male muscle-bound torso is an icon of power, fine-tuned in the air-conditioned confines of an expensive gymnasium. But in South Africa, that torso, called a "six-pack," embodies inequality and oppression. The poor nutrition and gruelling labour conditions of apartheid inured the bodies of African men to hardship. These hard bodies were the perfect raw material for capitalists of the racist regime. They also served individuals seeking fame in the professional sports arena. Yet the glorification of physical strength reached new social heights as the liberation struggle moved into the guerrilla phase in the 1970s and 80s. Comrades, like Fernando, decided to go beyond the daily hide-and-seek with apartheid administrators and police to pursue formal military training outside of the country. Boys who had never known a word of praise from their families became respected heroes, revered as "liberators." Yet despite their inflated egos, these young men were still scarred by the emasculation of apartheid's class and racial domination. To be a "real man," many inflicted considerable violence against women, which was largely concealed during the struggle.

Once the liberation elite moved from a state-in-exile to government, the aura and adulation surrounding the warriors faded. Those hard bodies were progressively stripped of their decorations as the African National Congress took power in 1994 and distanced itself from the guerrilla's methods and functions. Some were absorbed in the ranks of the new army, private security firms hired others, but many were left on their own. Lacking the skills to compete for scarce jobs, they put their guns "to work" in crime.

Power of the gun

With about 13 million firearms circulating in a country of 40 million people, the gun has become a veritable extension of the body. It represents the power to "have" women, to rob and dominate others, to dismiss the victim's humanity. South Africa has the highest per capita rate of reported rape in the world (for every 100,000 women, 1,300 are raped each year, according to a 1999 study). The country also has the highest rate of police killed. The grisly details of horrific crimes are a mainstay for journalists, with equal space dedicated to the swift hand of justice in the form of brutal police attacks.

The TV footage of the lifeless bodies of alleged "robbers" may satiate public hunger for revenge. Yet they drive repudiated young men, like Fernando, deeper into the bunkers of a violent masculinity. Perhaps the situation will change as the socio-economic landscape evolves. But so long as police attacks continue and poverty prevails, young men will find armoury in the cult of the hard body. ■

I sing the body electric.

Walt Whitman, American poet (1819-1892)

Both authors contributed to *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, edited by Robert Morrell, University of Natal Press and Zed Books, 2001.

JOAN WARDROP*: PATROLLING WITH SOWETO'S FLYING SQUAD

I have spent nearly 250 shifts (each about 14 hours long) observing the body language of the Soweto Flying Squad, an emergency-response unit of 250 policemen and a few women working in one of the most violent areas in the country.

Of the 275 South African policemen killed in 1998, more than 60 died in Soweto. Those who survive greatly rely on the hair-trigger control of just about every muscle, from head to foot. Experience has taught them to avoid the stereotypes of the macho cop, as one officer explains, "We'd be killed if we did that shit." The following scene underscores the powerful fluency of the Flying Squad body language.

Driving through heavy traffic, the police car suddenly stops: in the next lane, a group of seven or eight men are punching one another beside two taxis. Another battle has broken out between two rival taxi companies. As the two policemen get out of the car, a man at the centre of the fighting falls and is kicked hard, the sound of boots thudding against flesh audible above the noise of the gathering crowd.

The two policemen begin pushing back the attackers, when another taximan suddenly shoves through the crowd to kick the already bleeding head of the victim. A dozen taxis have stopped at the junction, passengers pointing and shouting.

One of the policeman takes a step back from the standoff and casually takes a cigarette from his top pocket. He lights it, breathing in hard, watching intently as his colleague stands face-to-face with the most aggressive attacker. The former refuses to look up at this man, who is taller than he is. Instead he squares his shoulders, using the muscles of his upper body to appear larger. He then sways back an inch or two to look directly into the eyes of the attacking taximan. Using his body as armoury, he suddenly shouts a sound rather than a word and the taximan flinches, jerking his head back. More than a hundred people are fixated on the drama. The police wouldn't have a chance if the crowd turned against them. But the flinch of the taximan was crucial.

The other officer throws his cigarette away with an abruptness that spells readiness to act. The two begin using their voices to push the crowds back. Control has been established. The man on the ground drags himself into his taxi. He sits for a moment, slumped over the steering wheel, and smiles at the police. ■

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2. PASSING RITES

Minding the **muscle** tone

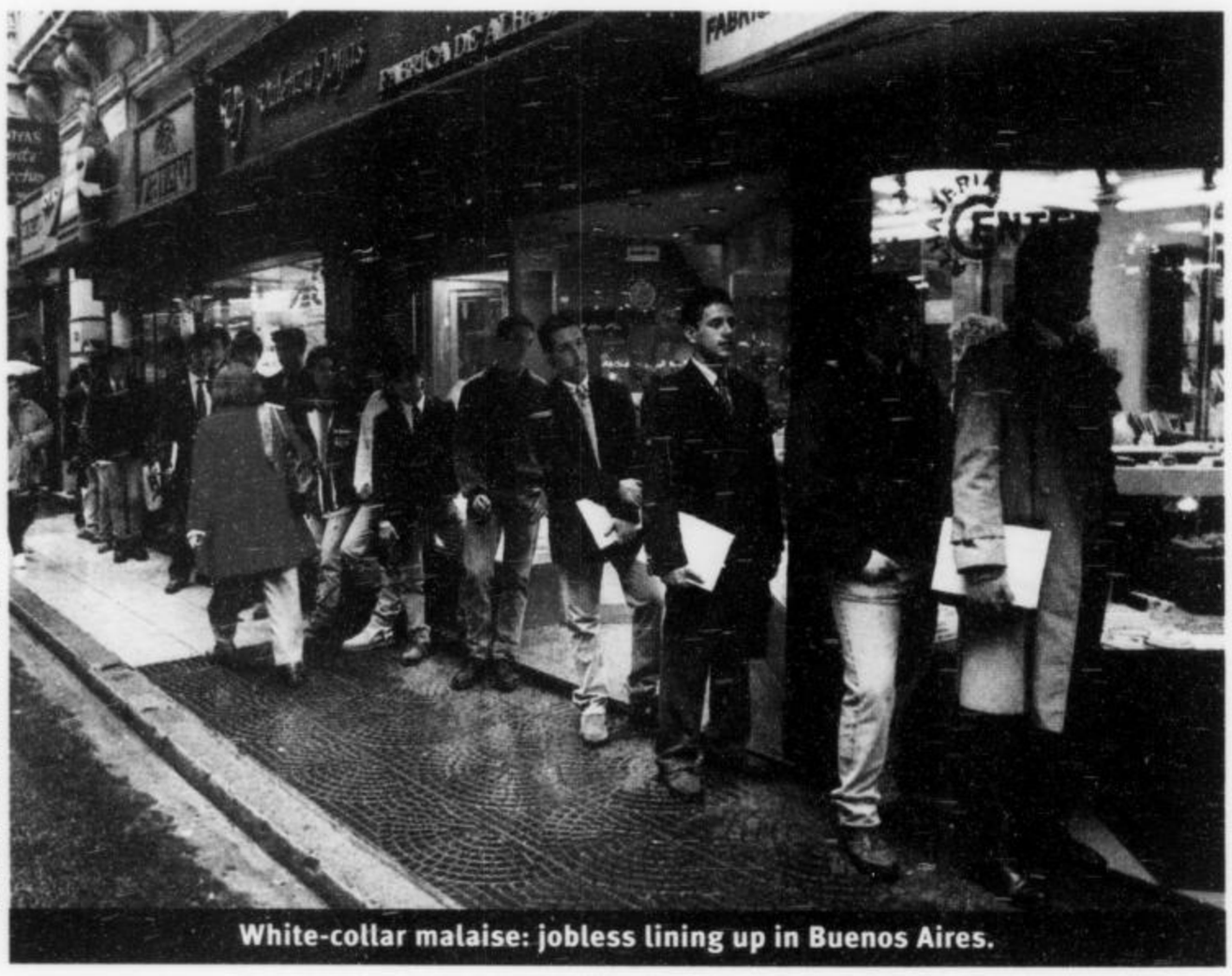
Argentine men used to earn their family's keep and rule the domestic roost. Severe recession has pushed some towards the bench press

MARTÍN GAMBAROTTA

POET AND JOURNALIST, AUTHOR OF *PUNCTUM* (LIBROS DE TIERRA FIRME, 1996)

Rodolfo Fogwill, aged 59, is one of Argentina's best writers. Also a respected sociologist, he served as a marketing advisor for many leading companies and claims to have made up to $30,000 a month in his days as a young executive. Yet he is anything but economically home and dry in Buenos Aires.

Car companies and candy manufacturers—his main clients—have dropped production by about 25 to 30 percent in recent years. Suddenly, Fogwill has free time on his hands and a black cloud over his head. He has found two solutions: writing poetry and intense exercise. "At least I am now producing some muscle," he says. "I could work for three pesos an hour. But you set yourself a price. When you are not paid that, you have time to spare."



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White-collar malaise: jobless lining up in Buenos Aires.

Clad in a track-suit, he demonstrates his latest kick-boxing move before talking about his daily exercise routine. "On a typical day, I walk two kilometres after getting up and smoking a few cigarettes. Then I do an hour of work at a gym, followed by push-ups and stretching for about 45 minutes."

Fogwill may be relatively well-off, but his quandary—and his muscular solutions—are far from unique. For the last three years, Argentina has been stuck in a recession. The turbulence in the local economy came at a crucial time, just as the country was trying to adapt to free market reforms. For the pockets, the minds and the bodies of men, it has been a time of harsh austerity and rebuilding.

"Normally, man is the provider in an underdeveloped society's handout of roles," says labour lawyer Horacio Valla, 51. "But what we consider to be basic necessities in an urban society have a degree of sophistication that is incompatible with current salary and unemployment levels."

Unemployment peaked at 18 percent in 1995. Currently it stands at 14.7 percent, while underemployment languishes at 9.3 percent according to the national statistics bureau.

Precarious identities

Browse through a newspaper and you can find the human stories behind the cold figures. Stewardesses, pilots and mechanics engaged in a labour conflict with the former state-run Aerolineas Argentinas recently spewed onto the main runway of the Metropolitan Airport, outside Buenos Aires. A struggle with riot police ensued. By the end of the night, a pilot had a black eye and blood stains on the gold bars of his blue uniform jacket. The pilot, with 22 years of service, was later interviewed on television. This is the message beamed out on the evening news: the country is hurting and it is grown men, those who had a career and more mundane concerns only a decade ago, who are taking the punches.

It used to be very different. According to Emilio Cafassi, head of the sociology department at the University of Buenos Aires, men formerly dominated the country's social life in a "classic Victorian structure" until around the 1930s. Only in 1926, for instance, was the woman formally allowed to work without the permission of her husband or father. As for the men, writer Luis Medrano speculated half a century ago that they could be conveniently divided into two classes: those who go to football matches and those who go to horse races.

Now, however, economic free-fall has brought redundancies and a particular crisis for men, whose "self-esteem is linked to institutional recognition," argues Cafassi. "Never in capitalism has there been such a degree of social vulnerability."

For men trying to meet the standards of a highly developed urban society, building muscle in the gym-

nasium or elsewhere can come as a relief and reassertion of their precarious identity. But it's not only men trapped in a situation of economic check-mate who take to the weights.

Fabián Casas, a 36-year-old editor at *El Gráfico*, the country's leading sports magazine, claims that the publication also has its share of economic tension. Exercise is a vital part of his routine since he took the job three years ago. Casas, who is single, talks about pressure and a growing existential void. "If I didn't produce some muscle, I would go nuts," he says.

Others, who have lost their steady jobs, simply refuse to be absorbed by the market again. Gustavo López, 40, was laid off two years ago from the power utility he worked for in Bahía Blanca, a port city of almost 300,000 inhabitants. "I went from making 2,500 pesos a month to having no income," he says.

"If I didn't produce some muscle, I would go nuts."

López used his severance pay to open a "cultural centre" in a downtown venue that was once a butcher's shop. Night activities include ethnic music concerts and Indian food. "All the family helps out," he says. But his body also feels the strain. "Right now I'm tired because the change from one activity to another is physically demanding." Only one thing remains as steady as ever: playing football twice a week.

"Men are under double pressure, because they do not meet demands due to unemployment, or because the salary they make is insufficient. Some men are able to respond, but without fully satisfying the expectations women have of their role," Valla says.

Besides losing their traditional role as family breadwinners, competition for employment from women has soared. Cafassi reports that there are now more female university students than male ones, while the number of women who head households is growing.

"Masculine problems are changing. Stress produced by auto workers manning production lines used to trigger sexual problems at home. Today production lines are slower, but the problems produced by unemployment are more fierce," he adds.

Alejandro Belloni, 36, was out of work for over a year before his sister found him a job as a hospital cleaner. He makes 1,50 pesos ($1.50) an hour, and works 12 hours a day, six days a week. Belloni, who lives with family, says he felt the demands of what he described as a *machista* society when he was out of work. "For women it is easier, but men are expected to give support." He now feels more comfortable when he dates women. But habits change. When out of work, he used to enjoy drinking beer with his friends at a corner kiosk. Now he has quit drinking—and shed several kilograms of weight. ■

2. PASSING RITES

China's timid **coming out**

Psychiatrists no longer view homosexuality as a mental illness, while the media is broaching the topic. But authorities prefer to keep the lid on a subject that could spiral into a human rights debate

STÉPHANIE OLLIVIER

FREELANCE JOURNALIST BASED IN BEIJING

"I think of my homosexuality as a source of creativity," says Cui Zi'en, with a cheeky look in his eye. Few militant homosexuals in China, such as this scriptwriter and teacher, dare to go public. Homosexuality is not illegal, even though the law against "sordid" offences that bars sexual relations in public was long used against homosexuals who met in parks.

The law was rescinded several years ago, but the attitude of Chinese doctors is still ambiguous. Social stability is cited as a reason for not treating sexuality as a private matter. Homosexuality, with its power to break up families and transmit Aids, is therefore seen as an illness. A handful of doctors, sociologists and campaigners, however, are managing to drag the debate onto more scientific territory.

Last April, the Chinese Psychiatrists' Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. "But it's still seen as a psychological disorder," says Cui Zi'en. "Psychiatrists have reclassified it, which isn't enough." Some doctors, he says, probably still want to "cure" homosexuals, which only prolongs the distress of those who "consider themselves abnormal." ▶

CROSSING THE LINE

Released in 1999, *Men and Women*, directed by Bingjian Liu, was the first Chinese film that depicted homosexuals as normal people living normal lives. Cui Zi'en wrote the script. "I wanted to show how we live day by day and to suggest that everyone can have a homosexual side," he says.

The film is set in a rapidly changing urban society where different lifestyles coexist. In this context, the line between male and female sexual roles is blurred. "Encouraging people to think in these terms could be more effective than waving banners," he says.

Homosexual characters in earlier Chinese films appear as victims. In Chen Kaige's *Farewell my Concubine*, for example, a young actor with the Beijing Opera is condemned to be a sexual plaything of a lustful mandarin. Or else they try to understand their "problem," as shown in the confrontation between a proclaimed homosexual and a policeman in Zhang Yuan's film *East Palace, West Palace*.

Is the vision of Cui Zi'en premature? So far, the authorities have not allowed his film to be shown in China. ■

© Cahiers du Cinéma collection, Paris

Liu Dalin, a well-known sexologist, says homosexuality can be seen as criminal, an illness or normal. "China is still at the illness stage," he says. "People still regard it as a problem."

Rejecting the pleasure principle

Public opinion is an obstacle to any change. Attitudes have been shaped for centuries by Confucian morality and then communist puritanism. For decades, individual pleasure—dismissed as "bourgeois"— was beyond the pale. "You just couldn't talk about sexuality," says sociologist Li Yinhe, who specializes in sexual behaviour.

Since the 1980s, however, individual freedom has expanded, especially in the big cities, and the Chinese are once again learning how to listen to their feelings. "But sexuality is still regarded as simply procreation," says Ye Guangwei, a volunteer at an advice centre for homosexuals in Beijing. "The idea of pleasure is poorly regarded." All the less so when it concerns homosexual pleasure, he continues: "A man who isn't masculine is disdained. And for him to take on a female role during a sexual act is unthinkable and a disgrace in people's eyes."

In Confucian tradition, a man's job is to start a family in order to produce male heirs who will ensure the continued worship of the ancestors. Not surprisingly, a large number of Chinese homosexuals still marry to save appearances and lead clandestine sex lives.

In cities, tradition does not hold such weight, partly because of the government policy of the one-child family, according to Li Yinhe. When a couple has a daughter, the family lineage is broken, and it becomes impossible to respect tradition. Furthermore, greater professional mobility also allows young people to escape the pressure of their parents.

The "comrades," as Chinese homosexuals call each other, think a change in media attitudes could alter public opinion. After he appeared in a televised debate broadcast by a provincial station, Cui Zi'en received calls from mothers who said they had been amazed he did not seem to be perverted or unbalanced.

In recent years, local media have touched on the subject, but only timidly for fear of igniting the state's wrath. "We're not really a danger in the eyes of the government," says Ye Guangwei, "but it prefers to stay in line with the moral convictions of the majority." To support a sexual minority would risk extending debate to the slippery slope of human rights in general.

Respect begins at home

The media prefer to ignore homosexuality so as not to offend the authorities. They in turn avoid disturbing public opinion, keeping prejudices well-entrenched through lack of information. To break this vicious circle, "we have our part to play too," he says. "We have to teach people to like their own bodies and to respect them before they can be liked and respected by others."

Many would simply like to be able to live openly as homosexuals. "In the West, it's frowned on to criticize homosexuals and even more to make them feel different," says Cui Zi'en. "I can understand a heterosexual being startled at seeing a very effeminate man. Chinese society is changing, but there'll always be people who'll feel disgust, like they might jump if they saw a snake. We're not going to tell them they have to start liking snakes, are we?" ■

2. PASSING RITES

The passing of bodily seasons

For Moroccan young women, sexual awakening rhymes with danger. In the countryside, girls are often married off at 14 and deemed old by 30. But in cities, the young are starting to hold their ground

SOUMAYA NAAMANE GUESSOUS

MOROCCAN SOCIOLOGIST, UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, AUTHOR OF *PRINTEMPS ET AUTOMNE SEXUELS* (EDDIF, 2000) AND *AU-DELÀ DE TOUTE PUDEUR*, EDDIF, 1988.

During recent fieldwork in Bni Meskine, in southern Morocco, I felt disarmed, worthless and at a loss before the cruelty of what turned out to be a veritable slave market. For the first time in my life, I lied to conduct my study. My ploy: Sanaa, one of my students, is seeking to marry off her two brothers with 13- or 14-year-old girls. As for myself, I'm supposedly looking for a spouse for my uncle, widowed at 70. My goal: to prove that this market indeed exists, and that parents in the countryside pay little heed to the legal age of 15 for marrying their daughters.

In this region and many others, the *smasyra*, brokers who supply city dwellers with child labour, are also sought out to find potential brides. From one home to the next, we witnessed scenes like these…

We are greeted by three women belonging to different generations: the matriarch, her daughter-in-law and her 14-year-old granddaughter. The young girl busily skirts around us, wiping the table, putting away our shoes, shaking the cushions. I observe her, a budding beauty, her body charged with promise. Is her father prepared to betroth her without a marriage license? "Yes, he married the eldest when she was 14. The girls have nothing to do. As soon as their *zmane* (destiny) arrives, we marry them." Then the paternal uncle greets us. "I'll give you 15 girls if you want. They are educated, never lift their eyes from the ground nor raise a voice of complaint. They'll put up with anything without a whimper."

Another home: the wife of the household greets us. She is pregnant with her seventh child. "Choose the one you like. They've all had the same education. All they do is work. They never go out of the house. They get pregnant on their wedding night."

I felt like screaming at the thought that these girls would be married so young, savagely deflowered and left disgusted by the sexuality forced upon them. Men keep a close watch on their daughters. Their honour lies in controlling the female body. Women uphold this tradition by muzzling their own bodies which they learn to do from puberty on. Female sexuality is channeled by marrying off young nubile bodies. Such dramatic practices are part and parcel of everyday life in a countryside mired by poverty and isolation, where nine out of ten women are illiterate.

Our research in Casablanca found that in cities, puberty is no less of a painful experience. Young girls are taught by their mothers, aunts and grandmothers an outdated sex education revolving around taboos. The young woman's body beholds danger. Her sexuality does not belong to her. She cannot be entrusted with something so fragile yet potentially explosive, for it can lead to her loss and that of her whole family. So every sexual drive must be stifled. As one young woman explained, "My mother controlled my movements. I was told not to jump or to spread my legs for fear of losing my virginity. I was terrified by my sexuality."

Double standards

While older women once went into shock when they started bleeding unknowingly, the younger generation is better informed about menstruation. Yet they still suffer from a pervasive sense of anguish. From the outset, teenagers live in conflict with their bodies. Menstrual blood is impure, dirty, shameful. "I learned that it was *haram* [a sin] to let anyone see the blood because God punishes this severely." Menstruation provokes a feeling of rejection of the body: "I feel dirty, I no longer take care of myself, I hate myself."

There has been some progress in the cities where the age of marriage has been pushed back to about 26 years old. Still, society strictly condemns extra-marital sex, a taboo that in practice, only applies to women. When one student told me that girls who made love before marriage were prostitutes, I asked, "So are you a virgin?" I reminded him that the proscription applied to both sexes. Disarmed, he replied, "No! Religion applies to girls, tradition to boys!"

Even though a Moroccan woman can expect to live longer than her husband to the ripe age of 70, her femininity is ephemeral. Society kills her sexuality prematurely by imposing a "social age" ▶

© Sabine Weiss/Rapho, Paris

A young bride in traditional dress.

after which she is no longer considered seductive. At 31, according to men, she is past the age of getting married. At 40, she is old. A blossom barely in flower, she becomes an elder in a body without promise. By the time she reaches 47—the average age of menopause—she no longer exists as a woman. She is banished to live roughly 23 years within an asexual body. Amputated of her femininity, she must grieve her feelings of desire and seduction.

She renounces her sexual role and devotes herself to playing mother and grandmother. Having put her body at the service of her husband and procreation, she can now only exist through a soul that has to be purified. Religion becomes her refuge, as if Islam stifled desire. Illiterate older women may renounce their bodies in this way, but young women are reacting otherwise. Even mothers are now denouncing procreation. "I refuse to see my daughter live like me. So many pregnancies take their toll. She has to maintain her figure and stay beautiful," says a woman of 65. "I refuse to be like my mother," chants the younger generation. Indeed women today have an average of three children, down from seven 40 years ago.

Could this break the vicious circle? Young women—48 percent of the Moroccan population is under 20—are becoming emancipated, playing more sport and keeping an eye on their figure. Beauty cannons have changed, despite the pressure and expectations of older generations. "A beautiful woman must be well-endowed. Today, girls have no more charm, they're as thin as reeds," laments an elderly peasant. "You can see their bones—they must prick in bed."

The divorce rate is rising among the young. It's a sad reality, but one which proves that this population "is standing up for itself." Traditions may still be entrenched, but young women are cultivating body and mind. Through education and work, they are gaining their independence. "I'm not afraid of old age. Unlike my mother I won't let myself be treated like a useless old thing. I earn a living and have interests," says one young woman. "I don't only exist as a wife and mother. My life is in my hands." ■

Life may be short or long. It all depends on how you live it.

Paulo Coelho, Brazilian writer (1947-)

2. PASSING RITES

"Taking the dress"

A Malian woman who underwent excision at the age of 12 recalls the experience which led her to combat this ritual practice

© Peter Coles/Paris

"We were betrayed."

KHADI DIALLO

ACTIVIST FOR THE PARIS-BASED WOMEN'S GROUP FOR THE ABOLITION OF SEXUAL MUTILATION (GAMS)

That day will remain etched in my memory forever. At the time, in 1966, I was 12, my sister 10. Like every summer, we were visiting our paternal grandparents in our village 15 kilometres from Bamako in Mali. Early one morning, we went to see my aunt, my father's sister, whom we were always happy to visit because she spoiled us.

I didn't suspect a thing. My aunt called me into the bathroom. Several women jumped on me and held me down. They spread my legs open. I was screaming. I couldn't see the knife but felt them cutting me. I was crying as the blood flowed everywhere. They said, "Don't cry, it's shameful! You're a woman, what we're doing to you is nothing." They started clapping. They dressed me in a white skirt. No bandages, just something they had prepared with shea oil and leaves. I left. It was my little sister's turn. I heard her crying and begging me for help, and that hurt even more.

The excision was a plot. We were betrayed. We were living in Senegal, where my father was a civil servant. My parents were educated people, they were against excision. But at that time, it was a widespread practice in the countryside and city. Most little girls were excised much younger than us, and the occasion was followed by a party. We stayed with our aunt for almost three weeks. A woman she knew helped us because we couldn't stand up by ourselves. It hurt so much we avoided going to the bathroom. Our mother cried and kissed us the first time she came to see us, but she couldn't do anything. In Africa, the father's family decides whether children live or die.

Meanwhile, we were given our female education. We were told that a woman must be strong, tough, secretive and not too talkative. Sex was a taboo topic.

In our female education, we were told that a woman must be strong, tough and not too talkative. Sex was a taboo topic.

Mutilation never heals

I was filled with hatred and rage. I had not been brought up with that mentality. But I was resigned, despite the pain. I got married at 22. I never talked about the feeling of being incomplete, of missing a part of my body. Women were not allowed to express desire or pleasure. I could only talk to close friends about the fact that excision is not a wound but a mutilation. A wound heals, but a mutilation means disfigurement. It means removing a part that never grows back. When I had daughters of my own, I told my husband that I did not want them to be excised. He agreed. I protected them by not sending them to visit Africa when they were little.

It was not a sacred or religious rite, but a ritual passage. There is an expression in Bambara that says "taking the dress," which means becoming a real woman. Before excision, a girl is innocent, she can walk around bare-chested or even naked. After excision, she must keep her body covered. The person who has his or her child excised does so because that's the way things have been for generations. They are afraid that evil will befall the child if they don't. They have always heard, "when you have a daughter, you must have her excised so that she can become a perfect woman." But Islam never said "excise your daughters," even though many people think the Koran orders them to do so. Men invented excision to control women's sexuality. To be a real woman, her clitoris, which is considered to represent a man's sex, is removed. Excised mummies dating back prior to the appearance of Islam have been found.

African women have been denouncing excision since 1924, but at that time they were considered crazy. More recently, we have been lucky enough to have support from European women and the media to make ourselves heard. When I came to France, I started campaigning with several organizations, including GAMS (see box). Today, we are invited to clinics and maternity wards to tell mothers that excision is against the law. We campaign for prevention in schools and with social workers. We also see families individually. Psychologically, it's more difficult for girls born in France to undergo excision. Those who are 18 or 20 today will have or have had problems during their first sexual experience. The men of my generation learned to accept the unacceptable. But today's boys will not want girls who are undergoing excision now and will be old enough to marry around 2020. I know a girl who had to leave her neighbourhood because people made fun of her.

We are against excision in all its forms, even if it takes place under anesthesia in the hospital. Our campaign isn't just against the pain at the time of excision, but against the mutilation of our bodies. ■

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www.who.int/frh-whd/FGM/
www.rainbo.org

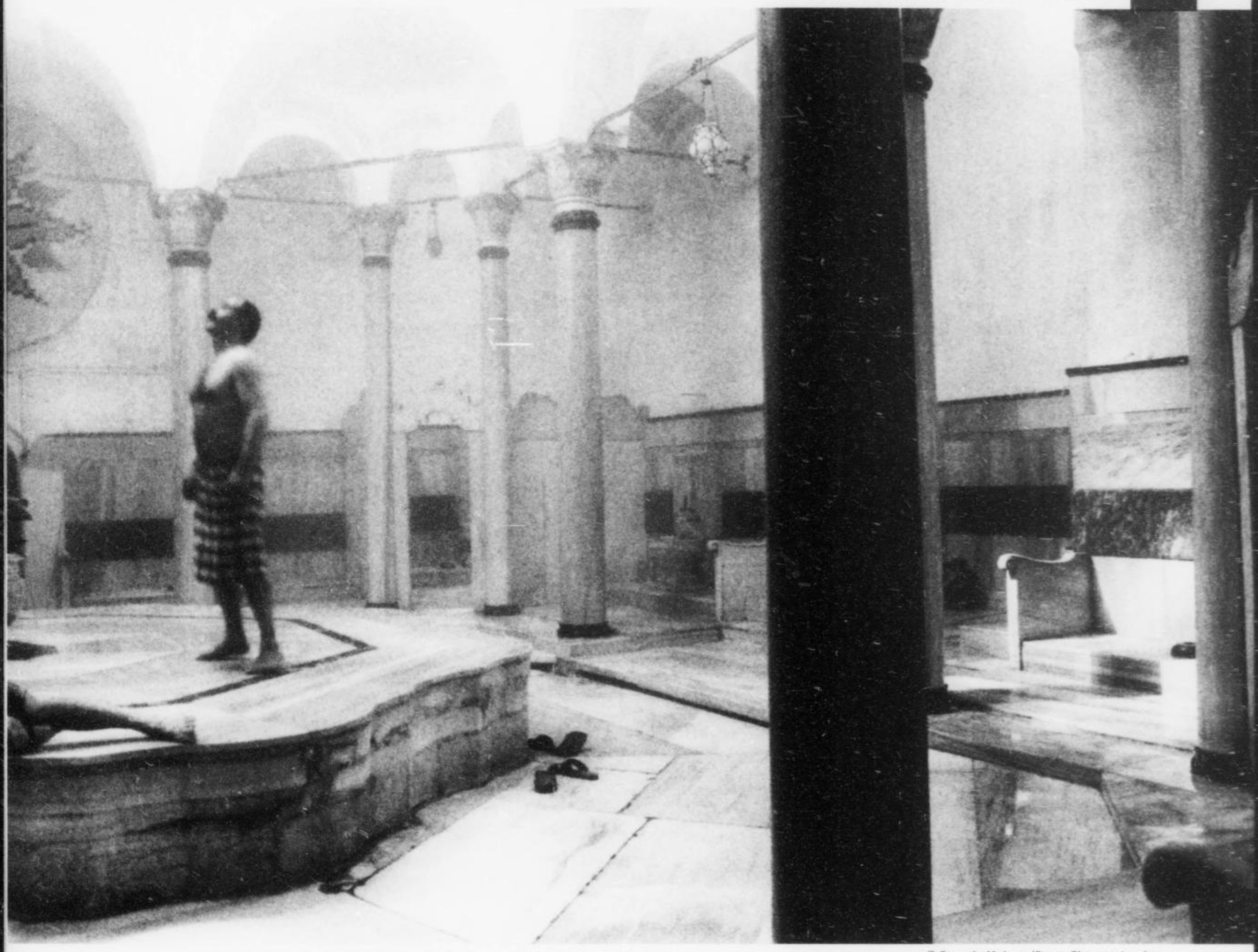
WHEN TRADITION BECOMES ABUSE

More than 130 million girls and women have undergone genital mutilation, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), which estimates that another two million are at risk every year. The mutilation (known as FGM) can take many forms but about 80 percent of cases involve the removal of the clitoris and often the small lip-like structure surrounding the vulva. The most extreme form is infibulation: the external genitalia are partially or entirely removed and the vaginal opening is stitched closed. FGM is concentrated in 28 African countries, although a growing number of cases are being reported among immigrant groups in Europe, Australia, Canada and the U.S. Cases have also been reported in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

FGM is considered a human rights abuse by a growing international movement of NGOs and UN agencies. These activists seek to eliminate the practice, not legitimate it on the grounds of cultural or religious tradition. They also reject its medicalization in which health professionals reduce the risk of infection.

The opposition is largely fuelled by African women like Mrs. Diallo, who volunteers with the French section (GAMS) of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children. Public awareness campaigns target communities, families and health authorities, while efforts are underway to develop laws to ban and sanction the practice. Some groups are also pushing for provisions to offer asylum to those at risk of mutilation in their countries of origin. ■

Above: languishing in Istanbul's famed Cagaloglu baths, built in 1741 in baroque style. The other two photographs feature the Yani Kaplica baths in Bursa, northwest Turkey.



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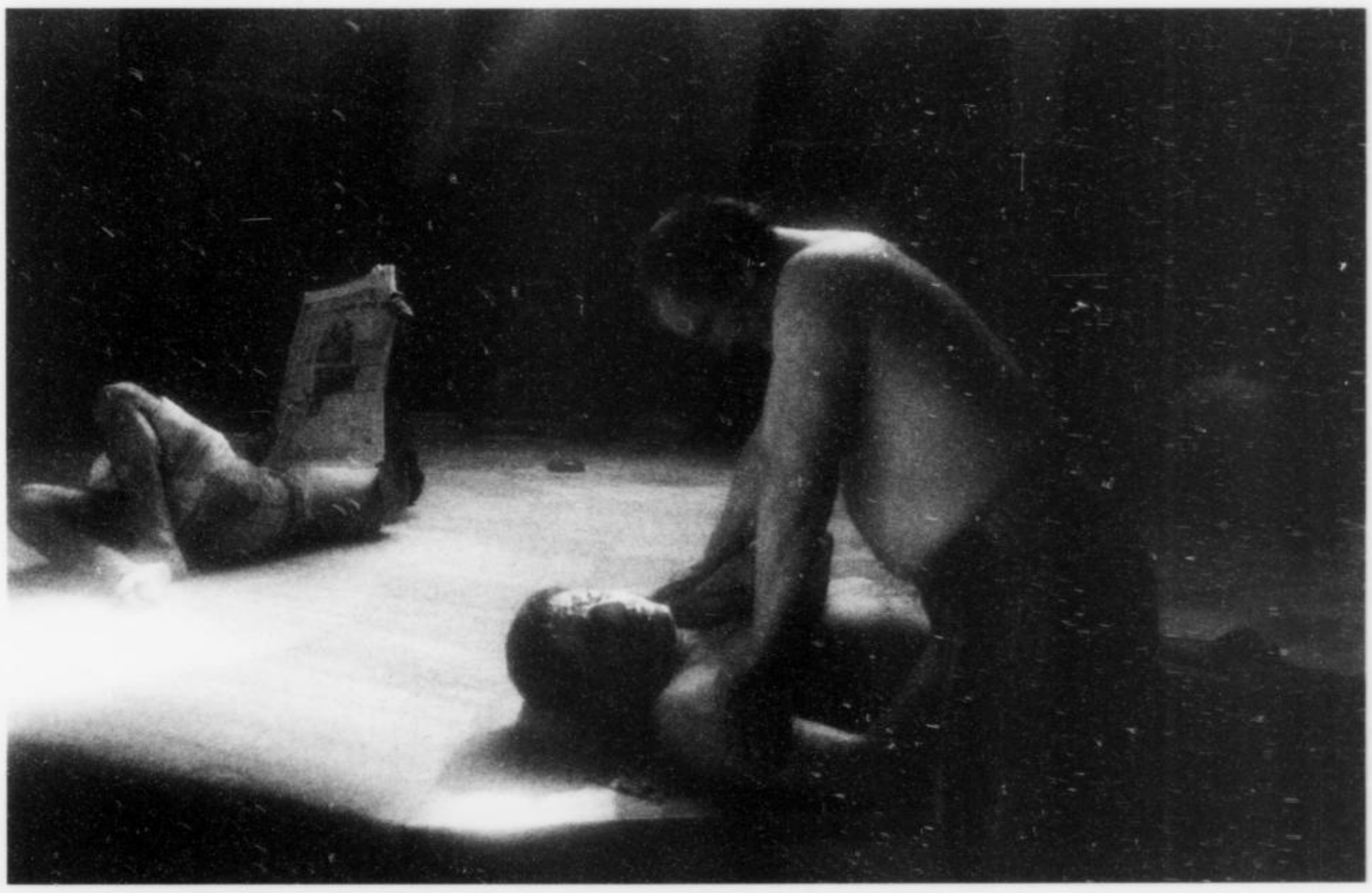

3. ESCAPING DESTINY

Illusions, scalpels and **stereotypes**

By sculpting a chin or enlarging a breast, aesthetic surgeons appear to be operating on the body. But we know better: they are reshaping our fantasies of ourselves

SANDER L. GILMAN

PROFESSOR IN HUMAN BIOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO AND AUTHOR OR EDITOR OF OVER 50 BOOKS INCLUDING, *MAKING THE BODY BEAUTIFUL: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF AESTHETIC SURGERY* (PRINCETON, 1999)

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Precursor Jacques Joseph.

Must you live with the body you are born with or can you remake it? We have long been confronting this question. Whether it be the removal of body parts in religious practices (such as circumcision), the surgeon's ability to sculpt a chin or the promise of geneticists to alter and improve bodies of the future.

This is the promise of innate malleability that we increasingly take as a given in our world, whether in Venezuela, South Africa or Hollywood. And nowhere is this desire for transformation more clearly seen than in aesthetic surgery.

In the west and beyond, we believe that we have the right not only to remake our bodies, but to control the process. Indeed the patients of aesthetic surgery are the ideal patients of modern medical systems. They are exemplars of autonomy, who question their doctors to explore their treatment options. Breast implants, facelifts and tummy tucks were not pushed upon people by the medical profession or industry. Virtually every procedure in cosmetic surgery has been in response to popular demand.

This desire for individual transformation is a distinctly western notion. It stems back to the Enlightenment ideology (beginning in the 17th century) that each individual could remake him or herself in the pursuit of happiness. Indeed, it is remarkable how often aesthetic surgeons cite "happiness" as the goal of their procedures. They have a utilitarian notion like that espoused by John Stuart Mill (1806-73): the active citizen, working for progress, is a happy one.

This idea took on biological dimensions once surgeons were able to reduce their patients' pain and risk of infection. The anesthesia and antisepsis originally developed by military doctors to heal battle wounds were quickly picked up by surgeons seeking to correct their patients' birth defects and then fulfill their desires. "Happiness" in aesthetic surgery lay in the individual's autonomy to transform him- or herself.

Indeed, by the late 19th century, the Enlightenment notion of self-improvement had moved from the battlefield of liberalism to the laboratories and surgical theatres. The destabilization experienced and repressed during the American and French revolutions re-emerged in a sea change in imagining who we are and what our bodies are. The political "unhappiness" of class and poverty, which led to the storming of the Bastille, was experienced as "unhappiness" within the body. Before, it was revolutionary change that would cure the body; later, it was the cure of the individual.

The hygiene of the body thus became the hygiene of the spirit and that of the state. By removing "ugliness," the aesthetic surgeon provided a type of surgical eugenics, a means of improving the individual and ultimately the state. Aesthetic surgery could transform the body into one that fulfilled the expectations of a new society and could change with them.

"Vanishing" into society

So by the turn of the 20th century, it was possible to start altering the body in order to become a "real" citizen in a foreign or hostile land. In the United States, for example, light-skinned African-Americans had their lips thinned and their noses rebuilt so that they could cross the colour line. And if they were too dark, they had their skin lightened. In New York, Irish immigrants had their "pug noses" transformed into "English noses" and their ears pinned back so that this sign of their "degenerate Irish nature" vanished and they could "pass" as American.

In Berlin there was Jacques Joseph (1865-1934), a highly acculturated young German Jewish surgeon. Born Jakob Joseph, he altered his too Jewish name while studying medicine at university, where he joined a dueling fraternity and bore the scars with pride. For some Jews like Joseph, a dueling scar marked the socially healthy individual in German society. But at the very close of the 19th century, after Joseph left university, Jewish men were excluded from the Christian dueling fraternities: they were considered different and thus dishonourable. For a Jew to bear a facial scar was to hide his sickly essence from the mainstream. So Joseph enabled his Jewish compatriots to "vanish" in society. He developed the first procedure of reducing the size and shape of the "Jewish" nose.

In January 1898, a 28-year-old man came to Joseph,

complaining that "his nose was the source of considerable annoyance. Wherever he went, everybody stared at him..." Joseph took the young man's case and proceeded to perform his first reduction rhinoplasty, cutting through the skin of the nose to reduce its size and alter its shape by chipping away the bone and removing the cartilage. On May 11, 1898 he reported on this operation before the Berlin Medical Society. He provided a detailed "scientific" rationale for performing a medical procedure on an otherwise completely healthy individual: "The depressed attitude of the patient subsided completely. He is happy to move around unnoticed." The patient was cured of the "disease" of "nostrility." Yet Joseph was not satisfied. The procedure left small scars that revealed the inauthencity of the body.

On April 19, 1904 Joseph undertook another procedure entirely within the nose. No scars remained to mark the individual. Joseph had learned that only (in)visibility left his patients "happy." They "passed" into German society. They desired to forget their bodies, to become one with those they imagined had no worries about the acceptability of their features.

This is the essence of "passing" and it sets the model for a radical rethinking of how we imagine our bodies. It is the model of malleability that we find in late 19th century Meiji Japan when it opened to the west. German physicians started modern medical schools and the Japanese began to remake themselves to approximate western images of beauty. The eyelids became double and the nose larger. They were passing into the world of the modern.

"The depressed attitude of the patient subsided completely," reported the surgeon, following an operation to reduce the size of the man's nose in the early 1900s.

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Promise or curse?

By the 1970s in the United States, Vietnamese Americans were undergoing the same sets of operations. Now, they are "passing" into a modern, global world of pan-Asian appearance. They give their 16-year-old daughters the gift of aesthetic surgery just as the American Jews on Long Island had done in the 1950s. Today Japanese girls are having breast implants at the age of 13—before their bodies have fully developed—to "pass" into the teen-world of global pop-stars.

We "pass" to regain control of ourselves and to efface that which is seen (we believe) as different. Aesthetic surgery allows relief from imagining oneself as different. The happiness of the patient lies in achieving his or her fantasy of being in control, rather than in the control of the observer on the street (who classifies people according to their physical appearance). The decision to remake oneself is not vain, nor is it morally wrong. Our claim of autonomy can and does make people happy.

This is an illusionary but necessary claim of happiness. The fantasy of "passing," unlike the fantasy of controlling the world, focuses on a single, limited aspect—a nose too large, hair too sparse, a breast too small. Changing that has symbolic significance for the individual—for the body that we change is symbolic, not real. It may seem that surgeons are operating on the material of the body, but they (and we) know better: they are reshaping our fantasies of ourselves. The new nose may resolve those fantasies or may lead us to demand even more proof of our control over our bodies. But the vocabulary of images is always shifting. We shall remake ourselves. Into what remains to be seen. Such is the promise and the curse of the modern world. ■

Anatomy is destiny.

Sigmund Freud, Austrian neurologist and father of psychonalysis (1856-1939)

3. ESCAPING DESTINY

Under the sun, **under the knife**

Venezuela may be in the economic doldrums, but cosmetic surgery is booming, highlighting the power of hidden racial discrimination and the ever-present North American concept of beauty

RAKEL SOSA

VENEZUELAN JOURNALIST

A few statistics are sometimes more telling than heavyweight sociological analysis. Venezuela has won more international beauty contests than any other country in the past 50 years, including five Miss World titles, four Miss Universes and countless other crowns and prizes. This is no accident: the record is proof in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America of some very deep social trends. Like in Brazil, the official line is that Venezuela is a tolerant multiracial country. But under the surface lies a subtle racism against the descendants of black slaves. It is expressed by an ideal of beauty which vaunts white skin, blonde hair and light-coloured eyes.

© Jay Ullal/Stern/Studio X, Paris

Looking good, the first step toward feeling good.

"They come to my clinic wanting thinner noses, slightly fuller lips, big breasts, firm bottoms and above all slimness—they all want to be slimmer," says Dr Pedro Meneses, a member of the Venezuelan Plastic Surgery Association.

Beauty in Venezuela has become a social value that often defines success or failure, personally and professionally. It is a value that sits atop the many other conventions demarcating the role of the woman in a society that has yet to accept various key feminist principles.

Torn between racism and machismo, many women regard beauty as an efficient way to leap upwards through the social ranks and often the only way to live.

The cult of beauty in Venezuela explains the country's huge boom in cosmetic surgery over the past decade. There are no official figures, but the reality is probably similar to that described by the American Association of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (AAPRS), which reports that the number of people seeking cosmetic surgery has risen by 60 percent in the past two years. Between 1992 and 1998, the association says, the most popular operations were liposculpture (up 264 percent), breast enlargement through implants (up 306 percent), face lifts and nose jobs.

Beauty budgets

Notions of beauty, however, are constantly changing. "The ideal for the last decade has come from the United States, which is only two hours by plane from Venezuela," says Meneses. "The difference is that our women are not blonde and blue-eyed, yet they struggle to make their bodies and features resemble this white ideal. I've never operated on a white woman who wanted a broader nose so she could look more like a black woman. It always goes in the other direction."

Despite the country's vast oil wealth, 70 percent of Venezuelans live in poverty. But when it's a matter of looking good, no expense is spared. A 1999 study by the U.S. market research firm Roper Starch Worldwide showed that Venezuelans spend a fifth of their income on personal grooming and beauty products.

Breast surgery, one of the most common operations, costs between $1,000 and $3,500 for each implant. Given the overriding importance of appearing and feeling attractive, even women from the poorer end of society manage to find the money needed.

More and more women between 17 and 35 are seeking not only slimmer noses and bigger breasts, but also different shaped bodies. "They resort to surgery because they feel socially rejected or aren't satisfied with their image," says Dr Alberto Salinas, who has been operating on stomachs for more than 15 years and is one of the country's few experts in the field. He reduces the size of a stomach so the patient eats less and gets thinner. "Half my patients don't want to feel better, they just want to look better," he says.

Images of success

Although they are not fat, many teenage girls are referred to his surgery for psychological reasons. "The social pressure is so strong that these kids swallow a box of diuretic pills and a box of laxatives every day," says Salinas. "When they're doing this and risking addiction to medication, I prefer to operate."

Many professional people, meanwhile, turn to the operating table in the hope of improving their social image and self-esteem. Morelia Pelayo, a successful dentist, says the breast operation she had a few years ago changed her life: "I've always regarded myself as a successful woman personally and professionally. But I had a complex about the size of my breasts. Since the operation, I've dressed differently. Because this is a Caribbean country with a lot of sunshine, I can now show off my figure to more effect and wear dresses with a lower neckline."

She nevertheless admits to being pushed to the big decision by the subliminal effects of television advertising. "All the women you see there have big breasts and bottoms, spectacular bodies and look beautiful and successful. It's natural to want to be like them," she says.

Amid this confusion between being and appearing, the fascination of Venezuelans for the quick and drastic changes the surgeon's knife can bring is starting to become a cultural trait—imported from abroad, yet strong enough to change the very nature of Venezuelan society. ■

My nose is huge! Vile snub-nose, let me inform you that I am proud of such an appendange, since a big nose is the proper sign of a friendly, good, courteous, witty, liberal and brave man, such as I am.

From Cyrano de Bergerac, *by Edmond Rostand, French playwright (1868-1918)*

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3. ESCAPING DESTINY

Beauty and **the blind**

A blind writer offers a piercing look at our penchant for staring at "beautiful people" and wonders why we so rarely agree on who belongs to this club

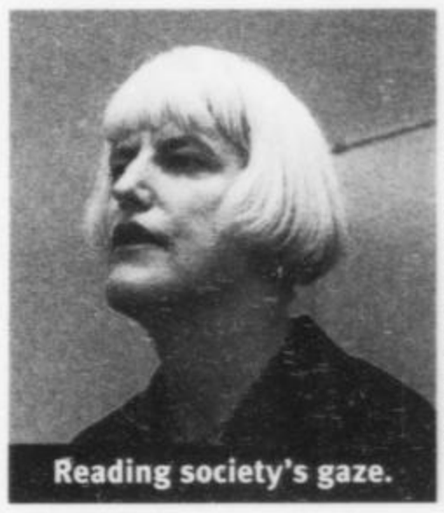
GEORGINA KLEEGE

AMERICAN AUTHOR BASED IN NEW YORK WHOSE MOST RECENT BOOK IS A COLLECTION OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS TITLED, *SIGHT UNSEEN* (YALE UP, 1999)

When I was young I used to think that most people were beautiful. This belief does not reflect an excessively benevolent view of humanity, only the fact that I am blind. I assumed that the majority of people around me must be beautiful because I could see nothing wrong with them. But to have nothing wrong is to be merely average, ordinary, plain. Beauty is rare, and like most rare things, desirable and precious.

Although I still don't know what beauty looks like, I now know a lot about it; at least I know the things people say. I gather that youth is generally assumed to be more beautiful than age, and that regular features and symmetrical forms are prized. And the eyes are always crucial, always the focal point of the ideal look. But it is not enough just to have youth, symmetrical proportions and lovely eyes. Every culture in every age admires certain traits and disparages others. Particular body types and body parts are esteemed; the size and shape of facial features, and the colour of skin, hair and eyes are all assigned relative values. An American beauty today might have less appeal in Asia, and probably would have been considered too thin a century ago. Even within the same culture, individual preferences play a role. On numerous occasions I have heard friends debate the relative beauty of common acquaintances and public figures, and have always been struck by how rarely everyone agrees.

Beauty is easy to recognize and hard to define. People spend a lot of time talking about it, and a lot of money and energy trying to achieve it. And the ▶



Reading society's gaze.

© Nicholas Howe, United States

3. ESCAPING DESTINY

The organ of **last resort**

Modern medicine has given rise to a booming trade between poor and rich countries—the trade in human organs. But what of the bodies that are being plundered?

NANCY SCHEPER-HUGHES

MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGIST
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

During the summer of 1998, I was sitting at a sidewalk cafe in downtown Sao Paulo with Laudiceia da Silva, who had just requested a legal investigation into the large public hospital where she had "lost" a kidney during an operation to remove an ovarian cyst.

The young woman's family doctor had discovered the kidney was missing during an examination soon after surgery. When confronted with the information, the hospital representative told a highly improbable story: that Laudiceia's missing kidney had been embedded in the large "mass" around her cyst. The hospital, however, refused to produce either their medical records or the evidence—the diseased ovary and the kidney had been "discarded," she was told. To make matters worse, Laudiceia's brother had been killed in a random act of urban violence several weeks earlier, and the family had arrived at the hospital too late to stop his organs being removed on the basis of Brazil's new "presumed consent" law.

"Poor people like ourselves are losing our organs to the state, one by one," Laudiceia said angrily.

"Follow the bodies"

Hers is but one of several credible stories of "kidney theft" that anthropologist Lawrence Cohen and I have encountered in South America, India and Bangladesh as part of our work for the Berkeley Organs Watch, an independent human rights organization seeking to investigate allegations of medical abuse in the harvesting, distribution and transplantation of organs.

The project stems from experience on a prestigious international taskforce set up to investigate the organ trade and develop ethical guidelines to prevent abuses. Soon after reaching the conclusion that the trade was far more extensive than previously thought, the Bellagio taskforce was disbanded. In the absence of any other institution of its kind, Organs Watch was conceived as a stop-gap measure, offering a frontline response to reports of illegal organ and tissue sales or theft anywhere in the world.

Our simple mandate is to "follow the bodies." We follow transplant patients from dialysis clinics to surgery, and donor bodies from township shabeens [bars] to police stations and public mortuaries and from there to the various eye banks, medical clinics and research laboratories where their parts are harvested and redistributed. At times, the surgery theatres feel more like theatres of the absurd, as a few scenes plucked from our fieldwork will show.

In a Chennai (Madras) slum in South India, my colleague Lawrence Cohen met five local women, each of whom had sold a kidney for 32,500 rupees (about $1,200 in 1999). Each had undergone their operation

A woman reveals a scar left after her husband's kidney was re

at the clinic of Dr. K.C. Reddy, India's most outspoken advocate of the individual right to sell a kidney. Unlike the more seedy "organs bazaars" of Bombay, Dr. Reddy prides himself on running an exemplary clinic: his kidney sellers are carefully screened, fully informed about the medical risks and provided with free health care at his clinic for two years after kidney removal. The

women Cohen interviewed were mostly low-paid domestic workers with husbands in trouble or in debt. The kidney sale was usually preceded by a financial crisis. Did the sale make a difference to their lives, Cohen asked. Yes, for a time, but the money was soon swallowed by the usurious interest charged by the local money lenders. Would they do it again if they could? Yes, the women answered.

Several months later, I sat next to Rosemary Sitsheshe at her home in Guguletu township outside Cape Town, South Africa. Her only son, 17-year-old Andrew, had been caught in the crossfire of township gang warfare just before the end of apartheid. He died of a chest wound under police surveillance. The next day Rosemary went to the local police mortuary to claim his body, but officials turned her away. Two days later, when the family was finally allowed to view Andrew's body, they were shocked: the blanket over it was covered with blood and there were two deep holes on either side of his forehead. Rosemary protested, saying he had been killed by a single, clean bullet to his chest. The state pathologist treated her and her husband abusively.

Later, accompanied by her own private pathologist paid for by the African National Congress, Rosemary learned at the morgue that her son's eyes had been removed and that inside his abdominal cavity the organs had all been severed and carefully replaced. "But were those my son's organs?" she asked. "I know my son's eyes but not the colour or shape of his heart or kidneys." At the local eye bank, Rosemary was told that her son's corneas had been "shaved" and given to two "lucky patients." The remains of Andrew's eyes were being kept in the refrigerator and the director refused to return them to Rosemary for burial.

"Although my son is dead and buried," she said, "is it good that his flesh is here, there, and everywhere, and that parts of his body are still floating around? Must we Africans be stripped of every comfort?" Rosemary Sitsheshe has since taken her complaint against the police mortuary and eye bank to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She asked that her case be treated as one example of a practice that was widespread in police mortuaries under apartheid and which continues in some instances.

© Jay Ullal/Stern/Studio X, Paris

moved without his consent in a private clinic in Bangalore, India.

Transplant tourism

In the most bizarre fieldwork expedition of my career, I went under cover to the grounds of Montes de Oca state mental asylum in the province of Buenos Aires in January 2000, accompanied by a private detective. We went there to see what, if anything, we could discover about persistent reports of blood, tissue, and organ stealing from the bodies of profoundly mentally retarded, but otherwise physically healthy, inmates. The reports first surfaced in the early 1990s following the "disappearance" of a young psychiatrist, Dr. Gubileo, who had lived on the grounds of the institution. She was apparently on the verge of revealing the illicit practices by the director of the asylum. A court-ordered search of the grounds of Montes de Oca did not recover the remains of Dr. Gubileo, but did recover a few bodies of unidentified missing patients.

The only witnesses to the doctor's kidnapping were two asylum patients, who said they saw her being pushed into the back of a van belonging to the asylum. But declared mentally incompetent, the witnesses could not give testimony in court. The allegations of other nefarious goings-on at Montes de Oca led, ultimately, to the arrest of the medical director, followed by his unexplained death in a prison cell the day before he was to give testimony in court. The case was then closed.

Human strip mining of the dead for usable parts is not limited to former police states in South Africa, Brazil, and Argentina. Similar practices can be found in one of the wealthiest communities of the United States. In the fall of 1999, I sat in a diner in Hollywood with Jim C., notorious "organs broker" who solicited international buyers and sellers from his home. "There's no reason for anyone to die in this country while waiting for a heart or a kidney to materialize. There are plenty of spare organs to be had in other parts of the world." Though Jim is operating in a grey netherworld, he insists that what he does is not illegal. "Don't think of me as an outlaw," he said. "Think of me as a new version of the old-fashioned marriage broker. I locate and match up people in need."

Organ transactions today are a blend of altruism and commerce; of science, magic, and sorcery; of voluntarism and coercion; of gift, barter, and theft. In general, the organs flow from South to North, from

The quality, not the longevity of one's life, is what's important.

Martin Luther King, U.S. civil rights leader (1929-1968)

poor to rich, from black and brown to white, and from female to male bodies. Today, affluent transplant tourists can travel to select medical sites in Turkey, Eastern Europe, Cuba, Germany and the United States in search of transplants that they cannot arrange quickly or safely enough at home. These special clinics can resemble four-star hotels or even as in Cuba, health spas for the rich and famous.

Israel has recently become something of a pariah in the transplant world. Without a strong culture of organ donation and under the pressure of angry transplant candidates, the Ministry of Health has refused to crack down on the country's multi-million dollar business in transplant tourism that arranges junkets from dialysis clinics in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to medical centres in Europe and the United States.

"Why should we Israelis be made to travel to third world clinics to get the kidneys we need to survive from the bodies of peasants, soldiers, or guest workers who may be in worse physical shape than ourselves?" a 71-year-old "kidney buyer" from Tel Aviv asked me rhetorically. "Organs should be seen as a human, not as a national resource." It was good to see "Avirham," an elderly gentleman, alive and happy with his revitalizing 22-year-old "peasant" kidney. And his living donor? "A peasant, without anything!" he replied. "Do you have any idea what $1,000, let alone $5,000 means in the life of a peasant?"

In terms of transplants, the kidney has emerged as the ultimate fetish, promising to satisfy the most basic of human desires —that for life, vitality and élan.

For most bio-ethicists, the "slippery slope" in transplant medicine begins with the emergence of a black market in organs and tissue sales. For the anthropologist, it emerges much earlier: the first time a frail and ailing human looks at another living person and realizes that inside that other body is something that can prolong his or her life. The desire is articulated: "I want that; I need that even more than you." In terms of transplants, the kidney has emerged as the ultimate fetish, promising to satisfy the most basic of human desires—that for life, vitality and élan.

The sale of human organs and tissues requires that certain disadvantaged individuals and populations have been reduced to the role of "suppliers." It is a scenario in which bodies are dismembered, transported, processed and sold in the interests of a more socially advantaged population of organ and tissue receivers. I use the word "fetish" advisedly to conjure up the displaced magical energy that is invested in the strangely animate kidney. Avirham, who flew from Jerusalem to Georgia for his kidney, explained why he would never tolerate a donation from a corpse: "That kidney is practically dead. It was probably pinned down under the wheels of a car for several hours. . . I was able to see my donor. He was young, healthy, strong. Just what I was hoping for."

In Brazil, the refusal of a corpse's kidney was just as virulent. A surgeon in the area of Copacabana Beach said that most of his patients refuse to consider an organ from an "anonymous" dead person. "My patients do not trust the public health system. They fear that the organ will come to them full of pollutants." The ultimate fetish is the idea of "life" itself as an object of manipulation. This fetishization of life—to be preserved, prolonged and enhanced at almost any cost—erases any possibility of a social ethic. Often when I speak of troubling issues in organs procurement, I am accused of "taking a chance for life" away from someone. But I am trying to underscore that there is another "body" of patients whose needs are being ignored or violated.

Notions of bodily autonomy and integrity are almost universally shared today. They lie behind patients' rights movements, the demands of the wretchedly poor for dignified burial and popular resistance to "presumed consent" laws. But for some of those living on the margins of the global economy, the possibility of selling an organ seems like an act of empowerment. "I prefer to sell it [my body] myself rather than to let the state get it," was a sentiment frequently expressed by shantytown residents in urban Brazil.

In fact, it is in the West where the values of bodily autonomy and integrity are most under assault. As commercialization has entered almost every sphere of life—from markets in "beauty queen" ova and "genius sperm"—those in the North cannot claim any moral high ground. Meanwhile, the new constitutions and bills of rights adopted by democratic Brazil and post-apartheid South Africa are far more developed than "ours" in recognizing human rights to bodily autonomy and integrity.

Organs Watch is seeking assurances that transplant practices include attention to the needs and wishes of donors, both living and dead. We ask that surgeons pay close attention to where organs have come from and the manner in which they were procured. We want the "risks" and "benefits" of organ transplant surgery to be more equally distributed among and within nations, and among ethnic groups, genders and social classes. Finally, we want assurances that the so called "gift of life" never deteriorates into a "theft of life." ■

Be quiet, be pure, toil not your body, perturb not your vital essence, and you will live forever.

Chuang-tzu, Chinese philosopher (350-275 B.C.)

Organs Watch website at:
http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/biotech/organswatch/

3. ESCAPING DESTINY

The **knot** in the **brain**

Philosophers since Descartes have striven to understand the connections between the material world, the body and the mind. Have brain scans brought us to the verge of an answer?

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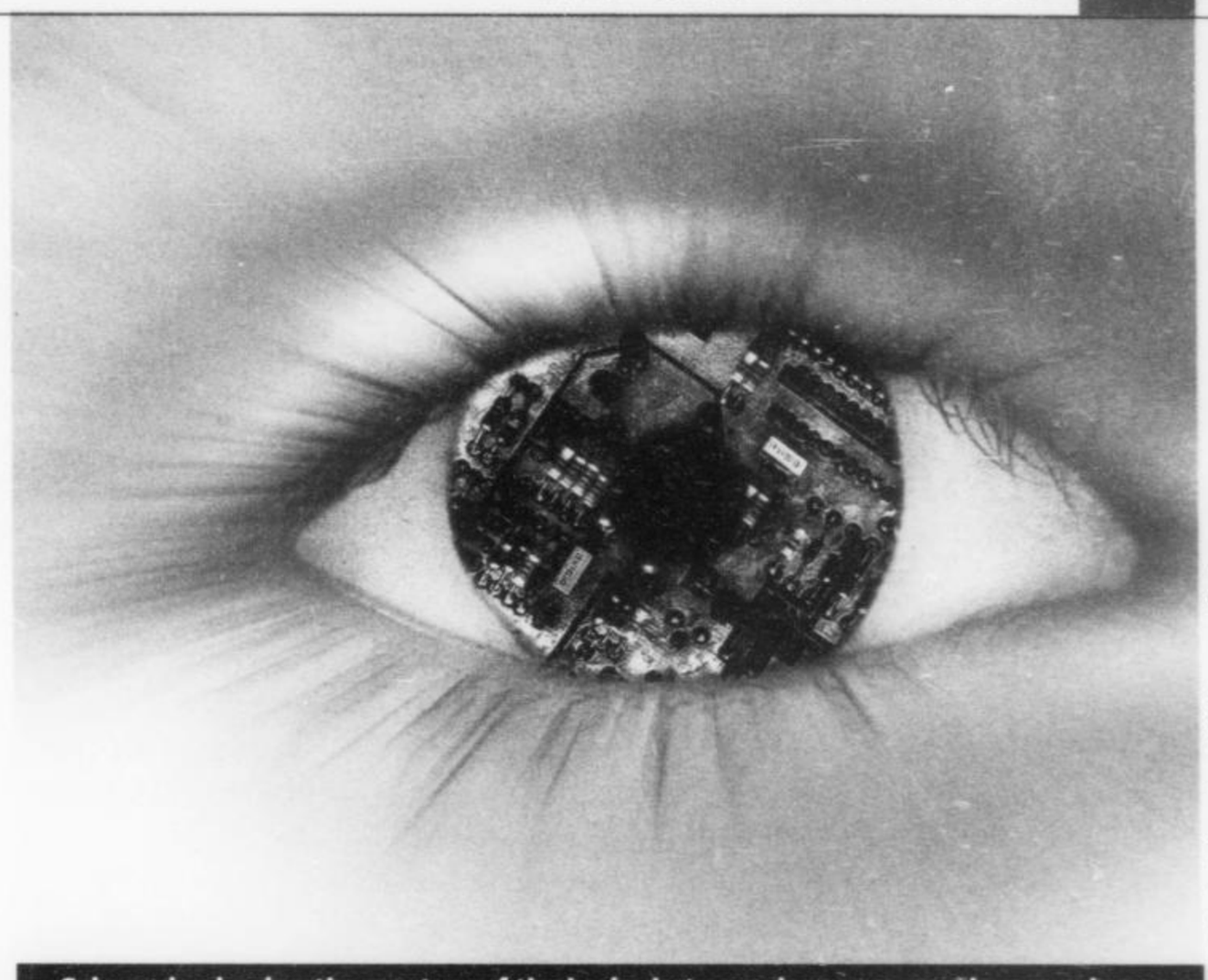

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Science is piercing the mystery of the brain, but consciousness remains an enigma.

Among the most important questions still facing human enquiry are those about the mind and its place in nature. What is mind, and what is it relation to body? How should we best understand our common sense concepts of such mental phenomena as belief, desire, intention, emotion, reason and memory? How does the grey matter of the brain give rise to our rich and vivid experiences of colour, sound, texture, taste and smell?

Discussion of the mind-body problem was given an especially sharp form by Descartes. He argued that everything that exists falls under the heading either of material substance or mental substance, where "substance" is a technical term denoting the most basic kind of existing stuff. He defined the essence of matter as occupancy of space, and the essence of mind as thought. But by thus making matter and mind so different, he raised the seemingly insuperable problem of how they interact. How does a bodily event like pricking oneself result in the mental event of feeling pain? How does the mental event of thinking "it's time to get up" cause the bodily event of rising from bed?

Descartes himself did not have an answer, and his successors had to resort to heroic solutions to the problem his theory had bequeathed. Their strategy was to accept dualism but to argue that mind and matter do not in fact interact, their appearance of doing so being the result of the hidden action of God. Thus for Leibniz, God acted like a clock-maker, setting the mental and material realms going in exact unison at the universe's beginning so that they thereafter act in parallel.

A much more plausible alternative, however, is monism: namely, the view that there is only one substance. Three possibilities rise to the fore. One is that there is only matter. The second is that there is only mind. The third is that there is a neutral substance which gives rise to mind and matter. Each of the three has had proponents but it is the first option—the reduction or annexation of all mental phenomena to matter—which has been most influential.

One materialist approach is the "identity theory," which asserts that mental states are literally identical with states or processes in the brain. In its earliest form, it asserted that types of mental phenomena are nothing other than types of brain occurrences, but this was quickly seen to be too sweeping, for a particular mental event (e.g. a mental image of the Eiffel tower) might in my brain activate one set of cells, while in yours another.

A football match between sociologists and physicists

On the basis of this theory, a number of philosophers currently maintain that as neuroscience advances, we will be able to eliminate the old-fashioned and imprecise mental vocabulary we standardly use. Research in neurology and cognitive science have built an overwhelming case for accepting a very intimate relation between mental and neurological phenomena. Neuroscientists now have highly detailed empirical knowledge of brain function and its relation to mental activity, and are able to locate the seat of many conscious processes in precisely defined brain structures.

But these advances only serve to correlate brain activity with mental occurences; they do not explain how the former actually produces the latter. Given the persistent difficulties in identifying that relation precisely, various strategies are proposed. One is to accept that our ways of talking about mental and physical phenomena are irreducibly different, even though they are about the same thing. Imagine, for ▶

example, how sociologists and physicists would respectively describe a football match, each focusing upon features which his particular science can address to describe the same thing.

The film inside the mind

Consciousness, on the other hand, can appear much easier to understand than the relation between mind and body: anyone capable of thinking is after all intimately conscious of being conscious. But consciousness is by far the most perplexing mystery facing philosophy and the neurological sciences. Some philosophers, in the tradition of Descartes, think that it is too hard for human intelligence to understand. Others even claim that there is no such thing as consciousness; we are actually zombies, just very complicated ones. In defiance of these views, enquirers have profited from powerful new investigative tools, especially brain scanning devices, to watch brains at work. One result is a great increase in knowledge of brain function and a refined understanding of the correlation between specific brain areas and specific mental capacities.

The central problem remains, however, of how coloured pictures, evocative smells and sounds arise in the head as if it were an inner cinema-show. One recent theory offered by neurophysiologist Antonio Damasio is that consciousness begins as self-reflexive awareness constituting a primitive level of selfhood, a powerful but vague awareness of being "I." Emotional relations to an evolving self and external objects then construct a model of the world, a feeling of knowing, giving each of us the sense that we are the owner and viewer of a movie-within-the-brain.

Consciousness has arisen amongst higher mammals, according to these theories, because of its survival advantage—an organism's appropriate use of energy and protection from harm are much enhanced when it is able to place itself in a map of the environment and make plans about the best courses of action in it. Creatures which are merely biological automata, even if highly sensitive to their surroundings, would not be as adaptive as creatures that are genuinely conscious

Debate about the mind has certainly resulted in a widespread consensus that mind is part of nature and amenable to investigation by scientific means, but there are still fundamental mysteries about what it is and how it relates to the rest of nature. The next great leap in understanding the mind will doubtless involve a conceptual and scientific revolution of such magnitude that we cannot at present envisage it. ■

3. ESCAPING DESTINY

A **release** from life

Strides in medicine may allow people to live longer, but the result is not always a happy one. In the Netherlands, euthanasia is now legally available—but just how far should we go?

WYBO ALGRA

JOURNALIST FOR THE DUTCH NEWSPAPER *TROUW*

Is a human body worth less in the Netherlands than elsewhere? Does it lose its meaning here once it gets old and decrepit? One might think so, for this European country of 16 million people is the only nation in the world where doctors, in accordance with the law, are able to end patients' lives.

In April 2001, the Dutch senate gave the new law on euthanasia the green light. The decision grabbed international attention, although it was the predictable outcome of a debate that has lasted a quarter of a century. The law only established what was slowly becoming normal procedure: that doctors are no longer punishable if they carry out euthanasia as long as they strictly conform to certain requirements of due care. For example, they must be satisfied that the patient is, according to medical criteria, suffering unbearably and incurably, and has made the choice to end his or her life without any outside pressure.

With the new law's approval, the glorification of suffering—a once pervasive streak in the Christian tradition—seems to have been consigned to the country's past. As Dutch theologian Annelies van Heyst recently put it in *Trouw*, an ordinary life brings enough suffering as it is. She nevertheless went on to regret that along with the glorification of suffering, the common rituals and comforting symbols of Christianity had also been swept away: "Our culture is focused on success and self-development. Fast, flashy, healthy—and when a problem comes up, this is felt as if life is taking you for a ride."

"Degrading" and "humiliating." With these words euthanasia was justified from the very first lawsuits in the 1970s and 1980s. Degrading meant, in the first place, physical decay, such as terrible bedsores, incontinence and loss of mobility. A culture that places increasing emphasis on a flawless and beautiful body is increasingly unable to cope with such ailments: this might be one explanation for the support for euthanasia, albeit rather a cynical one.

Advocates of euthanasia instead speak of self-determination and compassion. They feel that it's a doctor's duty to mitigate suffering, and the ultimate consequence of this duty is death at request. An oft-heard argument is that doctors themselves cause a lot of suffering in their efforts to repair the old, sick body. In the past, elderly people would often die as the result of a short and fierce infection, such as tuberculosis. These days, they have to live for years in a body that slowly gives up before finally dying after a wasting disease. Everybody has the right to go on to the very end, those in favour of euthanasia say, but nobody should be obliged to do so.

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Tired of life?

Many European countries might share the same demographics, but they're not necessarily ready to follow in Dutch footsteps. The law is the fruit of a unique set of circumstances. First, it required an influential organization, the Dutch Voluntary Euthanasia Society, which counts around 100,000 members, including many prominent names. Second, a small group of influential politicians, who had been trying for years to get euthanasia legalized, garnered support within the present left-liberal government coalition. Dutch doctors, finally, had long been seeking to be treated as integrated medical, psychological and social workers. Euthanasia—literally "a good death"—fit this holistic description to a T.

This particular alliance of doctors, politicians and patients, however, is now threatening to fall apart. Doctors see the new law as the final conclusion—"no further than this." But the Dutch minister of national health care, Els Borst, let it be known that she wants to initiate a debate over giving elderly people who are simply tired of life the means of putting an end to it, even if they are not terminally ill. The minister has the full support of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society. Again, the magic word is "humiliation." What if a person, after a rewarding social life, has to spend the rest of his or her years in total solitude after everyone around has passed away and every new day adds only more torment? Is this not just as humiliating as the last phase of cancer, with all the pain and loss of decorum that accompany it?

Over 80 percent of the Dutch population are in favour of euthanasia carried out by a doctor, on condition that all the legal demands about due care are met. There is much less enthusiasm for a more or less easily available suicide pill for those who are old and weary of life. According to a recent poll, 46 percent of Dutch people are against this, of which a significant number are over 60. Doctors doubt that the right to self-determination should go this far. Psychiatrist Frank Koerselman argued recently that "autonomy is an ideology, even a relatively fanatical one, to which the boundaries between life and death are being subordinated."

In the mid-1990s, Dutch doctors actively ended about 3,200 lives a year, representing about 2.6 percent of all deaths. The ageing of the population and developments in medical science will undoubtedly increase the demand for euthanasia, but not without limits: it has become clear that doctors refuse two out of three requests. Most do not regard being tired of life or "not wanting to be a burden to others" as valid reasons to carry out this procedure. Euthanasia mainly concerns cancer patients in their last days, and this is likely to remain the case in years ahead. When questions about terminating life are raised, doctors tend to fall back on familiar territory: the body. "They are there to help when there are biological functional disorders," wrote Koerselman. "To do this, they have instruments such as pills and psychotherapy. Suffering is only what brings people to the doctor. That the doctor can sometimes alleviate this suffering is a fortunate circumstance." ■

When the soul suffers, so does the body.

Paracelsus, Swiss physician and philosopher (1493-1591)

© Erling Mandelmann/Rapho, Paris

A lunchbox for **longevity**

Thirsting for the fountain of youth? There is no shortage of tactics to live longer, or perhaps forever.
Step number one: starve yourself...

Compiled by Ivan Briscoe, UNESCO Courier *journalist*

Eating

"One must eat to live, and not live to eat," wrote Molière, and the world of dieticians would tend to agree. Five to nine plates of fresh fruit and vegetables a day just about encapsulate the recommended diet for a lengthy life. Out go pizza, pastries, fried breakfasts and juicy steaks—all guilty of high cholesterol and "oxidative damage" to the body. Instead, bid welcome to broccoli (rich in antioxidants), bran (rich in fibres), steamed spinach and skinned chicken, rotated at one's pleasure and served with skimmed milk. Of course there have been notable dissenters. David Henderson, a Scottish farmer who died aged 109 in 1998, swore by a diet of porridge, prunes and a mixture of cattle salts and gin. Other suggested elixirs include champagne and vintage port. Scientists, on the other hand, insist that all laboratory tests point to the same conclusion: the best way to live longer is just to eat less, much less. Undernourished, cold and terminally bad tempered animals, they say, generally live to a ripe old age.

Pill-popping

Enough of raw cauliflower and Chinese leaf treatments—the busy Western consumer wants long life, and wants it before breakfast. Acutely aware of the market interest in user-friendly longevity treatments, researchers have been sifting through the potions. Top of the list at the moment is Dehydroepiandrosterone, or DHEA for short, a hormone produced naturally in the body by the adrenal glands, and that later transforms into oestrogen and testosterone. According to its disciples—and there are many—use of this drug can tighten skin, firm up bones and transform sex without a murmur of complaint. Unfortunately the evidence is limited, the influence on the liver and other organs unknown, and the usual perverse effects of hormone replacement (breasts for men, beards for women) as present as ever.

Additives

"Oxidative damage" is caused when cells in the body fail to process food efficiently and instead churn out molecules that oxidize the body—much as metal rusts, the flesh sags and genetic material withers. Vitamins A, C and E come highly recommended, as does beta carotene. Gingko, Ginseng, Bilberry, Soy Lecithin and Hawthorn leaves each have their supporters. Similar miraculous claims have been made for onions and garlic, which can either be taken raw, crushed into oils, served in juices or soaked in alcohol for over a week to produce an aromatic tincture. Taken together, this course of curative infusions is guaranteed to keep the doctor away.

Going genetic

But why stop there? Who says evolution and its army of tight-fisted genes should get in the way of immortal gratification? Now that the human genome has been plotted, numerous scientists believe the average life span can be stretched to 100 or 120.

Tissue engineering, laboratory generated organs and therapeutic cloning have all been proclaimed as the next great breakthrough. In particular, much is expected of stem cells that can fill in for wasted neurons, bone marrow and tissue. And if that doesn't do the job, there are always alternatives.

How about freezing your brain upon death and waiting around for a lucky break? Or what about porting into a computer or well-oiled robot? But if neither the vat nor the android tempts you, there is still some consolation: as Jorge Luis Borges wrote, the immortals lead numbingly empty lives, for like animals they have no consciousness of death. "It is divine, terrible and incomprehensible to know one is immortal," he wrote.

4. CYBERSPECIES

Teflon **under my skin**

Meet an aspiring cyborg who's already started experimenting on his own body, in the wake of the cyberpunk movement. He claims it's allowed him to turn the page on drugs and literally, rebuild himself

MARC MILLANVOYE

FRENCH JOURNALIST

We'll just call him Z.L. He's about 30 and has a body-piercing shop in southern France. His head is shaved and his chest is bare. A tangle of pipes, body organs and pieces of metal is tattooed on his right arm. His smile reveals a charming row of chrome cobalt teeth. The man dreams of building his very own steel skeleton and has already started his transformation by implanting five Teflon ball-bearings between his chest muscles.

Z.L. is a former punk, who went through a self-destructive phase of drug abuse but turned "wise" by focusing on his "technological body." Now he calls himself a cyberpunk. "A few years ago, I almost died. I needed a reason to live and that led me to create a new personality. As I rebuilt myself, I became a very positive person," he says.

Hosting parasites

The cyberpunk movement has followers around the world. In Australia, an artist called Stelarc has implanted himself with a third ear made of Teflon, the only metal the human body does not reject. In the United States, the method of sub-cutaneous implanting used by Steve Hayworth and Jon Cobb, extends beyond the world of art. Two hundred Americans have permanently changed their bodies at around $900 an implant. In France, such operations are strictly illegal except for medical reasons.

"When I used to get high in a stairwell, I was committing the crime of bodily harm. I was violating the law protecting the integrity of my body. But the law doesn't distinguish between the harm of getting high and positive reconstruction. So officially speaking, we get our implants abroad."

Z.L. swears by the apocalyptic writings of cyberpunk authors such as Bruce Sterling of the U.S. and Australian William Gibson, who regard human bodies as foreign objects. For these sci-fi gurus, bodies are just hosts for parasites of various kinds—physical for now, but before long, technological or even virtual.

Be it a laptop computer, mobile phones, smartcards or an electronic tag for a criminal—technology is increasingly becoming an extension of the human body. Z.L. is an assiduous reader of specialist publications like those of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It is only a matter of time, he says, before technology is integrated within the body. Anticipating the revolution, he has already taught himself how to do surgical implants and other operations.

"The state uses technology to strengthen its control over us," he says. "By opposing this control, I remain a punk. When the first electronic tags are implanted in the bodies of criminals, maybe in the next five years, I'll know how to remove them, deactivate them and spread viruses to roll over Big Brother." His work as France's first body artist to experiment with implants is confidential. He won't just operate on anyone. He carefully evaluates the philosophical, artistic or political motives of those who seek his services. For Z.L., technology stands for liberation, not enslavement.

"Handswriting," by the Australian performance artist Stelarc (1982).

© Keisuke Oki/Maki Gallery, Tokyo/Stelarc 2000

He follows in the steps of Kevin Warwick, a British professor who pioneered research into implants and nanotechnology and is determined to cross the line and change himself irrevocably into a "cyborg."

"Right now I'm working on how to implant a chip in my arm to operate, for example, my computer by remote control," he says. "I want to make technology part of my body so I'm not controlled by machines any more. It might seem a bit crazy, but at the rate computer technology, virtual memory and the power of computer chips are increasing, we'll all be asking in 10 years' time for implants to increase our knowledge, our intelligence and our memories. I'm just a step ahead of you." ■

4. CYBERSPECIES

Goodbye biology, **hello** software

Do we really need our flesh and blood? Ray Kurzweil, guru of Artificial Intelligence, believes that the conscious machine is only decades away—so get ready to download

INTERVIEW BY IVAN BRISCOE

Unesco Courier journalist

I let my body do what it wants. When you are in love, you cannot organize your body.

Roberto Benigni, Italian film director (1952-)

How close is Artificial Intelligence to creating something that resembles a human?

There are broadly two levels of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The narrow level is about getting non-biological systems to perform activities that require human intelligence when we perform them. Strong AI is about applying the full range, depth and subtlety of human intelligence in a machine.

We have many examples of narrow AI today. Machines can diagnose blood cells, guide cruise missiles and play games likes chess better than any human. They can read books and they can understand human speech. In comparison to humans, their memories are more accurate, they are faster and they can share their knowledge instantly by quick downloading.

There are two basic requirements for moving onto the next stage. One is just the brute force hardware capacity. Already, we are working on certain circuit technologies that will be a million times more powerful than the human brain, at least in terms of raw capacity. But the more important issue is the software of intelligence. In this regard, the most compelling project underway is one to reverse engineer the human brain, possibly by using billions of tiny high-resolution scanners or nanobots that can travel through capillaries and scan the brain from inside.

My feeling is that by 2030, we'll be able to recreate how several hundred regions of the human brain work in non-biological mediums.

Would that non-biological medium then be equivalent to a human?

We already have technology called a neuron transistor—an electronic circuit that can communicate wirelessly in two directions with biological neurons. We also have examples of intelligent machines placed in human brains via neural implants. A treatment for Parkinson's Disease, pioneered in France by Dr Alim-Louis Benabid replaces the biological cells destroyed in the first seven or eight years of the disease. The doctor demonstrated this by controlling the device from outside: when turned off, the patients remained in an advanced stage of Parkinson's—they were rigid like statues. He flicked a switch, and it was as if they had suddenly come alive.

By 2030, we will be able to send billions of nanobots inside the human brain to communicate wirelessly with billions of different points in the brain. They will give us the ability to combine our biological intelligence with non-biological intelligence. Ultimately you will have entities that are completely non-biological, with copies of human brains derived from reverse engineering, and you will have biological humans that have billions or trillions of nanobots in their brains augmenting their intelligence or enabling them to exist in virtual reality. So we will no longer be able to say humans on the left, machines on the right.

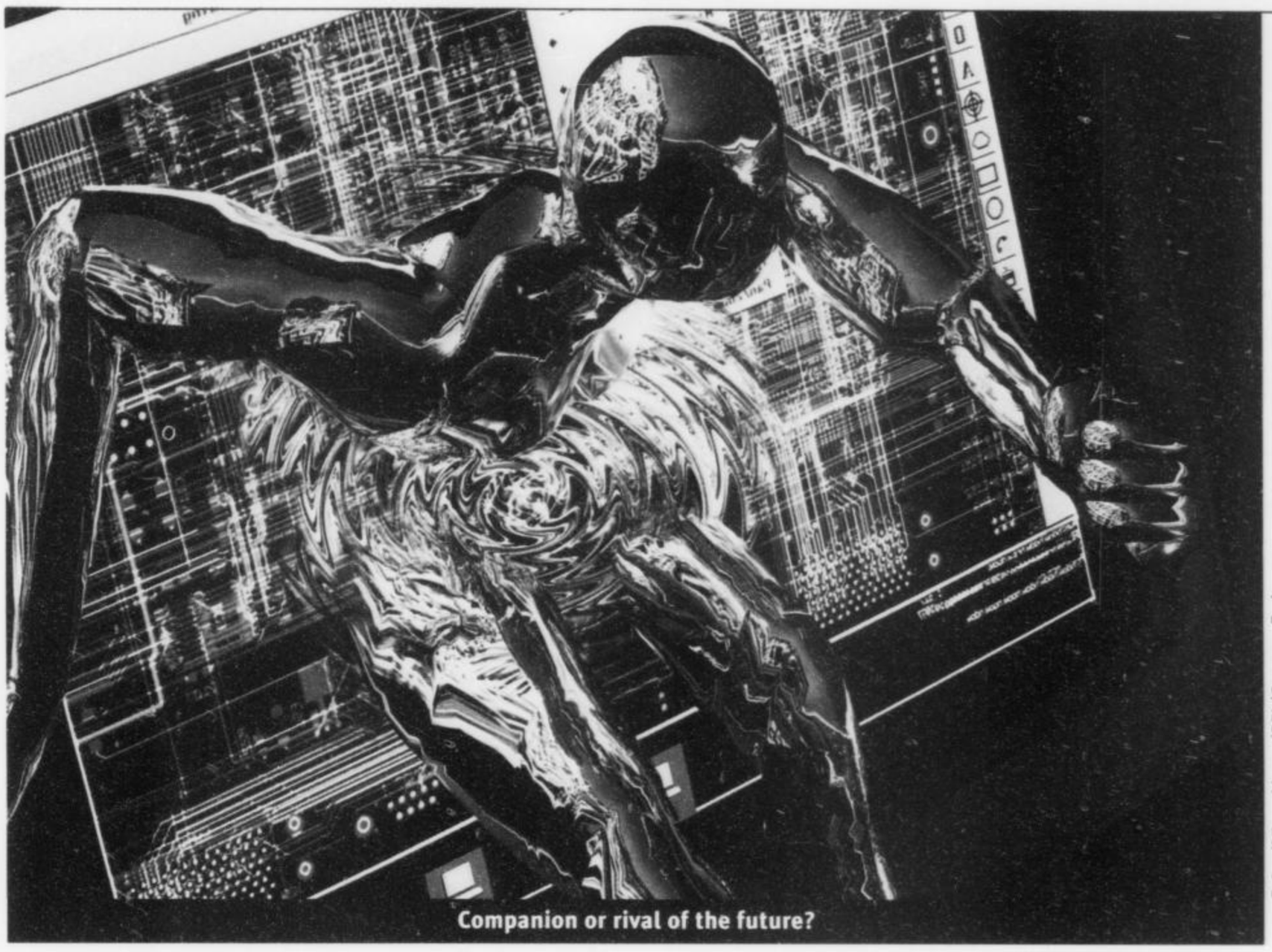
One of your most startling ideas is that of downloading the brain of an individual onto a computer system. Is this truly possible?

I discussed in my book some thought experiments of what that would be like. Is that the same person, for example? One simple thought experiment argues that it's not, that if you scan my brain while I'm sleeping and then reinstate it in a non-biological medium, I would not even necessarily know about it. I'd wake up, feeling nothing was different. Someone would come up to me and say: 'Good news, Ray, we don't need your old brain any more.' I would probably not accept that perspective. If you spoke to the new Ray, he would have a memory of having been me, but at that point he is a different person.

There's also the issue: is he a person at all? Is he conscious, or is he just acting that way? But the core essence of consciousness is ultimately not penetrable by scientific examination. We have a shared assumption about humans that they are conscious, but that shared consensus breaks down if you go outside humans. I'm really making a political prediction that humans will accept non-biological entities as conscious because they'll be so convincing in their behaviour.

What would be the benefits of being transferred onto a non-biological medium?

A lot of profound scenarios emerge, one of which is full immersion in virtual reality. These virtual reality environments will incorporate all of the senses, and will also be able to augment human intelligence. Right now we're restricted to a mere hundred trillion neuron



Companion or rival of the future?

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connections per second, millions of which are needed to operate one chunk of knowledge. We'll be able to vastly expand the human brain—think faster, think bigger, more complex thoughts, have more knowledge and download knowledge.

But many neurological theories argue that consciousness is in fact very much mixed up with emotions, with a sense of being in the body and having objects act upon the body.

Intelligence is the ability to solve problems using finite resources, including time. And the problems we solve have much to do with our body—protecting it, feeding it, clothing it, providing for its needs and desires. A lot of our thinking has to do with our bodies: a disembodied human intelligence would quickly become depressed.

But as virtual reality becomes more and more compelling, human civilization will be spending more of its time in it. By 2030 or 2040, these virtual reality environments will be extremely competitive with real ones through the ability to meet with people regardless of physical proximity and emulation of earthly and imaginary environments. These non-biological entities will be able to have human-like bodies in virtual realities. Also, through nanotechnology[1], they'll be able have human-like bodies in real reality.

What is driving this technology?

Ultimately we as a species have adopted evolution's goals, and they are in my mind virtual ones. If you look dispassionately at biological evolution, it has created entities that are more and more intelligent, creative, beautiful, more capable of higher emotions like love. God is a term that has been used to denote infinite levels of these qualities. What the new paradigm signifies is the end of biological humanity as the cutting edge of evolution. I see what we have been talking about as the next step in evolution through humanity merging with its technology and continuing its exponential growth in intellectual, creative powers. ■

1. *Nanotechnology is the construction of materials or circuits on the basis of complex, self-replicating chemical molecules.*

MACHINES AND THE MAN

Science at its most hairbrained, or the incisive portrait of a future where humans and machines blend seamlessly into one? The debate over Massachusetts-based scientist Ray Kurzweil's predictions for a post-biological era not far from now have stirred angst and controversy in about equal measure.

The one thing that cannot be doubted is Kurzweil's track record in artificial intelligence. In 1976, he pioneered the first print to speech machine for the blind, in 1984 the first computer music keyboard and the first speech recognition programme three years later. His vision of the near future was set to paper in a book in 1990 that predicted the world wide web, the spread of "smart" military weapons and the emergence of a computer that would conquer the world of chess by 1998. He was one year out.

No litany of inventions or honours, however, could spare Kurzweil a hostile reception to the ideas laid out in his latest volume of prophecies, *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (Viking, 1999). For many in philosophy, neuroscience and artificial intelligence, full human consciousness hovers beyond even a super-machine's potential—and possibly beyond all scientific understanding. Writing in *The New York Review of Books*, philosopher John Searle castigated Kurzweil for supposing that a computer simulation of a brain can be conscious: the computer, Searle argues, "just shuffles the symbols."

On a different note, Bill Joy, head of Sun Microsystems, drew from Kurzweil's work to rail against technologies that might eventually exterminate humankind. His fears have even been echoed by robot researchers such as Hugo De Garis, who recently called for urgent debate over what might happen if machines turn conscious and treat us much as we now treat dogs and cats. ■

Partnership or purse-strings: NGOs in the South speak up

Riding on their new-found influence, NGOs in the developing world are increasingly critical of the stringent conditions imposed on them by richer counterparts. Partnership, they argue, has to become more than a buzz-word

Benin's Songhai team is training 240 farmers in organic agriculture: "the North arrives with ready-made projects."

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PHILIPPE DEMENET

Unesco Courier journalist

Over the last decade, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in richer countries have tried out audacious and sometimes far-fetched methods to check how their aid is being spent by recipients in developing ones.

"We lent a video camera to a Ghanaian partner running a fair-trade project," says Chris Roche, programme director at the British NGO Oxfam, which funds more than $130 million worth of development projects each year. The Ghanaians did their own assessment, video camera in hand. The footage revealed a project agent embezzling craft workers' money. "We call this a participatory self-assessment, because it allows our partner to get more involved with the beneficiaries at the grassroots."

Other NGOs use peer reviews, crossed assessments (when partners in the developing world assess projects in the North) or consultations via a kind of travelling parliament. Last spring, Marc Berger, programme director at the French Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD), visited three continents to meet "partners" in developing countries. During a series of seminars he spoke about the organization, with a budget of $26 million per annum, and how it goes about selecting projects. "Our openness empowered them and made the terms of our relationship more equal," he says.

These various methods, which are still in the pilot stages, aim to rectify the lopsided relationship between donor

NGOs in the North and their beneficiaries in the South. But invariably, "the hand that gives is above the one that receives," as an African proverb goes. Even after such consultations, CCFD is still the one which chooses the projects to fund and the rules to be imposed. "They're consulted but in the end we decide, even though their opinion can carry weight," admits Berger.

Mounting dissatisfaction

World Bank figures show that NGOs have "grown exponentially" over the past ten years, especially in developing countries. In India, more than a million community-based groups are involved in local development. In Bangladesh, 5,000 organizations are involved in literacy efforts—so many that a child there is more likely to learn to read with their help than via the state education system. In the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, 100,000 NGOs sprung up between 1988 and 1995.

In terms of human development—health care, education, help in finding work, social services and emergency aid—"the role of NGOs in the South has become key," says Guillaume d'Andlau, a lecturer at Strasbourg's Political Studies Institute and author of a book on humanitarian action. "Even governments in the North call upon them for their overseas development programmes."

Their influence may be indisputable, but NGOs in the developing world are increasingly dissatisfied with the unequal terms of the relationship. Since the early 1970s, NGOs based in the richer nations have used the impressive term "partnership" to describe their links with colleagues in the South. The word "has been part of approved rhetoric in the 'development community' for a very long time," according to Gerry Helleiner,[1] an economics professor at the University of Toronto. "It has rarely been effectively practised. Some practitioners have long doubted whether it was possible."

Delivering results

Far from ebbing away, Northern NGOs are putting increasing pressure on those in developing countries. According to Oxfam's Roche, the idea is "to get them to increase their involvement and provide tangible proof of their effectiveness."

Novib, a Dutch NGO with a $120-million annual budget, requires aid recipients to supply accounts every year, ▶

Songhaï*: the North looks for an echo of its own song

Does partnership mean equality? At Songhai, we don't think so. Here, it means complementarity, a shared approach towards a mission, mutual respect and transparency at all costs. It's a question of not letting one side trample over the other.

Unfortunately, the world is far from this ideal. In the South, NGOs are too often born in a burst of enthusiasm or as a reaction to a problem, without any long-term strategy. After that, their sole concern is survival. All too often, there's a frenetic race to win the attention of Northern "partners," gleefully described as "donors."

NGOs in the South live on a drip: they're ready to take all the aid they can find. In a perpetual state of dependency, they don't try to mobilize local resources in the field that might help make their projects sustainable. "White elephants"—abandoned edifices that have cost a fortune—are the sad result.

The weaknesses on the other side are just as flagrant. Our "partners" from the North arrive with ready-made projects devised in offices in London, Paris, Washington and Brussels, with preset conditions and eligibility criteria. Then they go off searching for people and institutions to back them up, looking for an echo of their own song as it were. And they have no problem finding one. Even though their priorities change all the time—one day it's environment or gender equality, the next capacity-building—their Southern "partners" are ready to change strategy and even their identity simply to satisfy the Northern "partners."

Sometimes, though, the latter come across institutions like Songhai, who have their own ideas and want to preserve their dignity through mutual respect. This leaves them rather confused. In the past, we've had to return funding already paid into our account, notably to two religious groups (one Protestant and the other Catholic), and to a multilateral aid agency. The reason: their goals and conditions were no longer in line with the vision and strategies that we'd tried in vain to share with them.

Not all donors have this one-track attitude. Songhai is currently working with a public international aid organization which, after seeing how we operated, agreed to give us some leeway in the use of their funding. All Songhai's activities and programmes aim to boost our own resources in order to reduce the amount of aid we receive from NGOs or aid agencies. We think self-sufficiency is the only way to sustainable development. ■

** The Beninese NGO Songhai—named after an empire that existed in the bend of the Niger river in the 15th century—was set up in 1985 by a Catholic priest, Brother Njamuno. It is currently training 240 apprentice farmers at three centres in integrated organic farming based on making the best use possible of local resources.*

Noel Aguirre Ledezma*: We can help the North

Our relationship with Northern donors depends largely on the NGO we're working with. When mutual understanding is strong, the desire to draw up joint projects arises quite naturally. These are based on a shared political vision and similar technical and organizational approaches. When that happens, the discussion is not just about sums of money or how to handle them. It's even less about the need to respect the goals of the project down to the last comma. In this scenario, you're close to the notion of a true partnership.

But with other NGOs, the relationship only repeats and underscores the South's dependence on the North. In these cases, you only talk about preset criteria for the project's aims or management. Everything is seen through Northern eyes, with the unspoken assumption that "people in the South don't know how to manage."

You'll find these trends in most NGOs in the South. Some are only interested in securing funds and reducing North-South relations to a straight transfer of money. This has to be changed. The first question we should ask is what we can build together. How can we help the North in our own field of competence, whether it's education, culture or human values? What networks can we create so that together we don't just build up a poor part of the world—the South—but a different world altogether, rooted in fairness and solidarity? ■

** An educator who heads the Bolivian Centre for Educational Research and Action (CBIAE), an NGO with Dutch, German and Spanish funding.*

as well as twice-yearly financial statements and a final report on the project. "When there's a problem with the spending of funds, the local partner might get a visit from an expert," says Jan Ruyssenaars from Novib's project department. The organization, which defines itself as a donor at the service of Southern NGOs, is far from the fussiest in the field.

Not all NGOs make the same demands, but there are fewer and fewer who make none at all and advocate a hands-off approach, according to Rick Davies, a social development consultant based in the UK, who has studied how donors in general operate. The most "laissez faire" tend to be Christian organizations. At the other end of the spectrum are the hard-liners, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which requires extensive information and the meeting of set targets akin to a business contract.

Between the two camps are the minimalists, who think producing reports diverts the energy of Southern NGOs from their most important work. You also have the "apologetic realists," such as Novib and Oxfam. Though aware that the reports are a burden, they need them for their own donors. "Without being neo-colonialist," says Roche, "every time money is disbursed, we need to know exactly where it goes out of respect for the British citizens who give us donations."

Sending back the money

The bottom-line is that demands made by richer NGOs are meeting with increasing resistance. Some NGOs in the developing world even return money to donors who become too "domineering." More often, in countries where several sources of funding are available, they shun donors who are too bureaucratic or finicky.

"Everyone wants a donor who will listen, take time to learn and allow room for local initiatives," says Lisa Bornstein, a researcher at Natal University's School of Development Study, in South Africa. Certain NGOs in the South which accept a more contractual relationship insist that funding arrives on time, and that the donor does not change priorities or monitoring procedures in the middle of a project, as often happens.

When asked—and when they dare speak up—NGOs in the developing world usually repeat the same lament: "the North claims to knows what's best for us, poses as an expert and doesn't take the time to listen or the trouble to use local skills and resources."

Passing on expertise

By the mid-1990s, donor organizations could already see the danger of stifling local initiative by being too heavy-handed. "The principles that underpin partnership are incompatible with the notion of conditionality imposed by donors," said the chairman of the OECD's development aid committee at the time.

Conditionality has lost none of its relevance, whether it relates to gender equality, environmental protection or other domains. But the notion is challenged by NGOs that have several donors to choose from. "Fishermen from the Cape, who are mostly men, didn't understand why they had to bring women into their profession," says Bornstein. "They complied, but these conditionalities can lead to absurd situations, just to please the donor. As for the environment, the deep poverty in our country still makes it seem like a luxury."

To escape this unequal relationship caused by money transfers, some NGOs in the South see only one way out: strengthen their ability to fund themselves.

The CCFD's South African, Mexican and Chilean partners have said as much. "You talk to us about self-sufficiency," they told Berger, "but why don't you pass on to us some of your expertise in fund-raising and mass-mailing?" ■

1. *In UNDP's magazine* Cooperation South, *Number Two, 2000.*

Zafrullah Chowdhury*: We choose our donors

For the first two years of our existence as an NGO, we didn't ask anyone for money. We lived in tents pitched around a clinic and the peasants would bring us rice. Then Abbé Pierre, from France, gave us some funding so we could build a house. That was the first money we received from abroad.

When I went to Europe in the winter of 1972, he told me: "I'd like to give you more because you've done good work. But I have one condition..." I cut him off at once: "I don't want your conditions, nor your money!"

He replied: "I'll show you Paris." And one freezing cold night, he showed me "his" Paris—places where the poor were being given soup and sheds where the Companions of Emmaüs were restoring abandoned furniture to raise money. I realized that he and I belonged to the same world despite our language differences.

Then he said: "Here's the condition. Never forget that I'm giving you the money of the poor to help the poor of Bangladesh. Always make sure they're the ones who truly benefit."

Thirty years later, we still ask ourselves that question: "Will it help the poorest people?" This is what Abbé Pierre taught us and I still remember that. Conditionality is not a bad thing, as long as it's founded on an ethic and favours human development. The problem comes when Western donors set poor conditions.

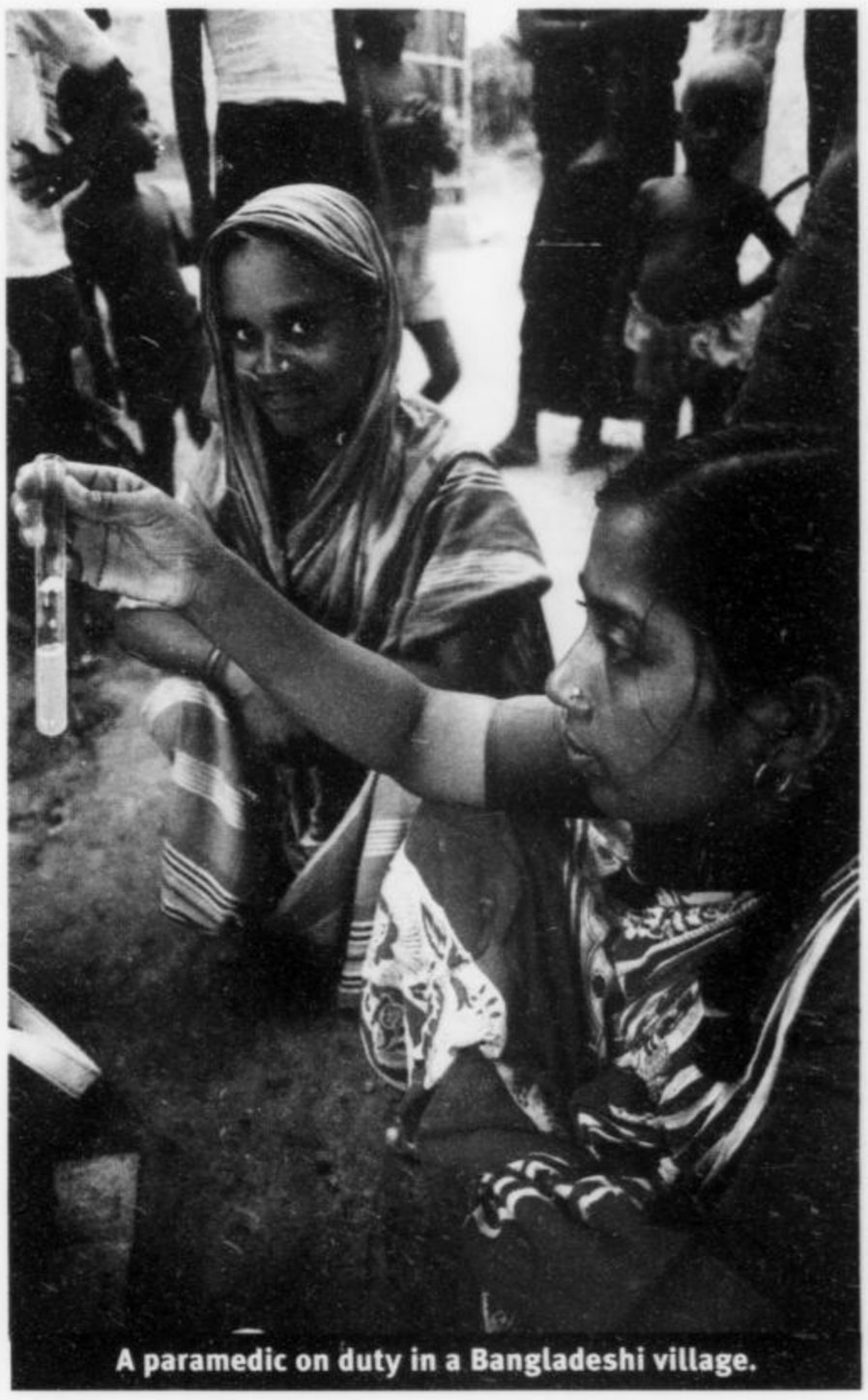
An example: child labour in the Bangladeshi textile industry is indefensible and I'm against it. But should it be simply banned, with its abolition made a condition of foreign aid? I don't think so. This is how the question should be looked at: what will happen to all the girls between 10 and 14 when they no longer work in the textile industry? They may become prostitutes or end up as slaves in a rich person's house. They certainly won't go to school, because the prices you pay in the North for the clothes made in these factories don't allow their mothers to earn a decent wage. It would be better for the child to keep on working and go to classes in the evening, paid for by the mill-owner or a foreign NGO.

At our People's Health Centre, we choose our foreign donors. The first thing we tell them is that we prepare our programmes and budgets. Then we tell them we have two "conditions." The first is that donors have to recognize that they know nothing about Bangladesh, and that I know the country better than they do. Then they have to be patient, because development is a slow process. That's why I ask them for long-term funding, of at least five years.

In the first year, the donor listens to us and learns. The second year, we discuss and negotiate. And because we know they're accountable to the body that provided the money—a worthy concern—the third year is given over to checking that every cent of the aid is used well. In the fourth year, disputes will most likely arise. But by the fifth year, we'll understand each other better. We'll even begin to see where we've succeeded, and where we haven't.

Five years is the time it takes to build a relationship of mutual understanding and friendship. But that's not enough. We also have to get out of this "secrecy illness" that donors bring with them (the World Bank and the Northern NGOs alike) and which has poisoned NGOs in the South. Who knows how much money has been handed over, to whom and for what? Secrecy breeds corruption. We're the only NGO in Bangladesh that posts details of our wages and financial statements in our local health centres. Because we are accountable to the people we serve before anyone else.

Transparency starts there. After that, with the Northern NGOs, it's a matter of mutual respect and trust. If we're dealing with a donor who understands us and believes in human development, I've no objection to him or her examining our accounts. But that person has to recognize my right to examine theirs. ■



A paramedic on duty in a Bangladeshi village.

© Roland Bourguet/La Vie, Paris

** A Bangladeshi doctor who founded Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK), the People's Health Centre, whose 2,000 employees, mostly women, promote primary health care, education and female empowerment in Bangladesh. The NGO trains its own paramedics (primary health workers) and manufactures antibiotics and generic medicines. It provides two-thirds of its own funding.*

Vive a trilingual Quebec!

The laws that forced French into the schools and workplace of Quebec have worked far better than anyone imagined. Trilingualism is gaining ground in the province, much to the chagrin of hard-line nationalists

FILIPPO SALVATORE

COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSOR AT CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, FORMER MEMBER OF QUEBEC'S FRENCH LANGUAGE COUNCIL AND A FORMER MONTREAL CITY COUNCILLOR

With her rugged natural beauty and charming accent, Quebec shines as an emblem of cultural resolve in countries with strong minorities, ranging from Spain to Nigeria. The little francophone island thrives in a sea of English-speakers*, thanks to its carefully constructed rampart of laws and educational policies promoting French. But Canada's "Belle Province" is set to change course: a new government inquiry has found that it's time to roll back the legal locomotive, Bill 101, which has forced French into the school system and workplace for the past 30 years.

All children must attend French elementary or high schools, according to Bill 101 (also known as the French Language Charter), with one exception: old-time Quebeckers who attended the province's English elementary schools can choose their children's language of instruction. French is the rule, however, for all newcomers, from Canada or beyond, until the college or university level.

Born in 1977, Bill 101 is the brainchild of Quebec's nationalist movement whose ultimate goal has been to separate from the rest of Canada, or at least seek greater autonomy within the federation (see box). The law stems back to the heady days of the Quiet Revolution, when French Quebeckers (the "Québécois") wrested control of the province from a powerful English elite, who controlled its huge natural wealth. Then they turned to the cultural landscape, using laws like Bill 101 to "Frenchify" (or "francify") the schools and

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"All Quebec on the march to live in French" in 1989.

workplace as well as the commercial environment through rules restricting the use of English on public signs or even on the beer coasters of a neighbourhood bar. Language police still roam the streets, measuring the letters of billboards to ensure that "Poulet-frit" dominates the fast-food world of "fried chicken," for example. The provincial government regularly adds a fresh coat of legislative paint to reinforce the spirit of 101. With each major brushstroke another wave of English Quebeckers migrates to other parts of Canada or the U.S.

When the "natives" feel outnumbered

Today the old-stock of English Quebeckers accounts for just 8.5 percent of the population, down from 13 percent in 1971. Yet according to the nationalists, the anglophone threat has not faded but taken on new dimensions, thanks to the "allophones," a nice way of referring to immigrants whose first language is not French. Every year, about 25,000 to 35,000 immigrants arrive mostly from Latin America, the Middle and Far East. Together the two minorities—anglophone and allophone—comprise 18 percent of the provincial population. The pure wool Québécois still make up about 82 percent of the population, despite having one of the lowest birth rates in the world. But many of these "natives" are convinced that they will soon become a minority in their financial capital, Montreal, where most minority communities settle. According to a survey conducted last year by the daily *Le Devoir*, 55 percent of all Quebeckers are convinced that French is in danger throughout the province.

So with alarm bells ringing, the provincial government launched an inquiry last year asking "what should Quebec do to ensure the future of the French language?" This kind of inquiry, known as the language estates-general, is somewhat of a ritual. Each time the provincial government pushes for a referendum on separating from the rest of Canada (see box), they turn up the heat on the language debate by pointing to the lamentable state of French. But after spending more than two million Canadian dollars on a string of public hearings across the province, the nationalists got far more than they bargained for. According to the preliminary report released on June 5, French has never been healthier in the "Belle Province." "The French language is no longer the property of the majority. It has become the language of everyone," announced the head of the estates-general, Gérald Larose, a former union leader and long-time Quebec separatist. Almost 95 percent of Quebec residents know and use French in their daily activities, up seven percent in just over a decade.

© Gil Guiglio/Hemispheres, Paris

"I remember" on every numberplate.

More than 90 percent of the province's newly arriving pupils are heading straight for French schools, according to Quebec's education ministry. Then again, their only alternative is to enroll in the private sector. But Bill 101 cannot force these kids to speak French outside of the classroom, yet many continue to babble and scream the language in the school-yards and playgrounds even in Montreal, where immigrants make up almost half of the French school population.

Even the old-time minorities—anglo- and allophones born and bred in Quebec—have adopted the spirit of 101. These parents could legally send their kids to English schools, yet about 75 percent opt for the French sector. There is one notable exception: the Italians, one of the largest and most established of Quebec's cultural communities. The majority continue with English schools. Instead of rejecting bilingualism, these families are embracing three languages at once. Franco-Italian marriage rates increase each year. Love, not ▶

The birth of 101

Before Bill 101, Quebec residents had the right to send their children to either French or English-speaking public schools, which owing to a twist in history were generally organized along religious lines. Back in 1867 when the Canadian confederation first emerged, Quebec had two major ethnic groups: French Catholics and British Protestants. Each group formed their own set of schools within the public system. But by the end of the 19th century, a new immigrant group settled in Montreal and confounded the clean division: the Irish Catholics. The compromise permitting the Irish to attend English schools set an important precedent. Since then, nearly every immigrant group, from Catholic Poles to Italians, has gone through English schools. Even francophone groups, like Moroccan Jews, were sent (by officials) to English classrooms to avoid the Catechism of the French system.

This arrangement suited French Canadians, who didn't want non-native French-speakers enrolling in their schools. But this tolerance lasted only so long as the French-Canadian birth rate remained high. It quickly faded during the Quiet Revolution when French Quebeckers began breaking free from the strict confines of traditional Catholic society. The new generation moved into the cities, focusing on improving their financial lot rather than settling down to raise large families in the countryside. At precisely the time when French family-size declined, immigration surged, particularly among Italians.

As English schools mushroomed in Montreal, the nationalist movement calling for Quebec independence emerged as a credible and powerful political force. These nationalists demanded measures to "correct" the linguistic and demographic imbalance reflected in the school system. A compromise was sought in 1968 with a law favouring French language instruction. But the nationalists were not satisfied. They wanted all children to attend French schools.

Two years later, French became the official language of Quebec but tensions continued to simmer until a full-fledged language war erupted in 1976, when the new separatist Parti Québécois, founded and led by the charismatic leader René Lévesque, won the provincial election. A year later, the nationalists passed Bill 101, a milestone in Quebec's language debate. ■

© Panos Pictures, London

Beware of the language police!

coercion, is winning this community over to French.

The trilingual allure has also won over hearts in the estates-general. While the final recommendations aren't expected before August, the Larose commission dropped a bombshell on June 5: the anglo- and allophone communities are no longer enemies but role models. "The old English-French antagonism in Quebec has been at least a little bit blurred and softened. And maybe a lot," announced Larose, before laying out a plan to not only promote French but English. Instead of reinforcing Bill 101, as many hard-liners expected, the commission suggested partially dismantling it by, for example, abolishing the language police.

Time to learn English?

According to the Larose commission, Quebec needs a new charter or constitution to officially recognize French as the province's language of citizenship. Yet, it continued, English also merits respect as the language of Quebec's official "national minority." Anglophones would have guaranteed access to judicial services, health care, social assistance programmes and education. "We're trying to say to the anglophone community that your place in this society is recognized, that your future is assured," said one of the 11 commission members, Dermod Travis, president of the non-governmental Forum Action Quebec, which aims to promote dialogue among all Quebeckers.

Perhaps the ultimate irony lies in the recommendation that French pupils improve their English. As it stands now, children attending English schools must learn French from the first grade. Yet francophone pupils wait until the fifth grade before taking English classes, which tend to be of rather poor quality. As a result, only about 38 percent of French Quebeckers are bilingual. It's as if they have been lulled into complacency, convinced that in the land of 101, English isn't necessary to earn a living. But not only do their job prospects plummet the moment they step outside of Quebec, but the competition is already heating up within as bilingual and trilingual allophones grow in number.

"Blasphemy!" cry the hard-liners of the nationalist Parti Québécois. The state of French remains "precarious" because there are still too many people who speak English in the privacy of their homes. Immigrants may use French in the workplace or at school but, say the hawks, switch immediately into English at home or when socializing. For these hard-liners, integration amounts to assimilation and anything less than that is treason.

If the father of Bill 101, Camille Laurin, wanted to mould newcomers into good neo-Québécois, the result is disappointing. The Bill 101 generation learns to speak French, but still keeps an open mind towards North American culture, while holding on to its own maternal language and values. These young people and their parents generally accept the principle of French dominance in Quebec. It is now time for the Québécois to assume their role as a well-established and respected majority, not a threatened minority. The white, French-stock, Catholic paradigm has been shattered and replaced by a multiracial, multireligious and multilingual one. It is time for less coercion and more incentives.

** Quebeckers represent a quarter of the Canadian population (29.5 million).*

The Canadian divide

Quebec's language debate stretches beyond its provincial boundaries to touch the core of Canadian identity and unity. For the past 30 years, Canada's ten provinces have tried to amend their constitution to resolve the conflict between a federalist vision of the country and Quebec's demands for greater sovereignty.

The debate stems back to 1971, when the Québécois nationalist movement first threatened to separate from the rest of Canada, leaving a gaping hole in the middle of the confederation. Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, (a French Quebecker), proposed the vision of an officially bilingual and multicultural country, with a strong federal government and ten equal provinces. Separatists like René Lévesque rejected the concept and launched the notion of a political sovereign Quebec, economically "associated" with the rest of Canada.

Lévesque presented this proposition in a referendum that the people of Quebec rejected in 1980. A second referendum was organized in 1995 by Jacques Parizeau, the provincial premier and leader of the Parti Québécois (PQ). Once again, the proposal was rejected but this time by a slim one percent margin. Parizeau attributed the loss to "money and the ethnic vote," a comment widely interpreted as a xenophobic and anti-Semitic allusion to Montreal's minority communities. The scandal forced Parizeau to resign.

In 1996, a more conciliatory leader, Lucien Bouchard, took control of the PQ and the seat of the premier. While open to negotiations with the federal government, Bouchard still tried to satisfy the hard-liners of his party by organizing the estates-general on the future of the French language in Quebec. For some of the hawks, the inquiry marked a first step towards another referendum on sovereignty. Once again, a nationalist, Yves Michaud, evoked the spectre of "the Jewish ethnic vote." Stunned by this anti-Semitism and the deep divisions it caused within the PQ, Bouchard resigned last December. Yet his moderate voice continues to echo in the conciliatory stance of the estates-general. ■

Mexico's mercenary legacy

For decades the Mexican media was paid to do the government's bidding. But what future lies in store for the press after last year's defeat of the all-powerful Institutional Revolutionary Party (the PRI) and the electoral victory of President Vicente Fox?

RAFAEL RODRÍGUEZ CASTAÑEDA

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Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos counts down the seconds to a press conference in February 2001.

On New Year's Day 1994, the world was astonished by the sight of a hooded guerrilla fighter giving a televised press conference in the main square of the Mexican town of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Subcomandante Marcos, the flamboyant leader of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, had decided to exploit the media as part of his movement's strategy. His first goal was achieved: in the smokey aftermath of New Year celebrations, the Mexican people awoke to find a war on their home turf and an abrupt end to the modernizing dream of the then president, Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

The media embraced the Zapatista war as they might an unexpected lover. They longed to be witnesses and players in the fighting around the mountainous state of Chiapas—and they got what they wanted.

The 10 days that shook Mexico were covered fully and freely by the country's media. Editors and reporters basked in the freedom and independence they had previously forsaken, learning a lesson that only a few of them had absorbed up to that point—press freedom could be good business. As a result, part of the Mexican press discovered a liberty and an influence it has clung to ever since.

The Untouchable and the Invincible

But what was the press like before the year when Mexicans lived in danger? In 1968, during the big student demonstrations that led to the infamous October 2 massacre in Mexico City's Tlaltelolco Square [in which at least 500 people are believed to have died], the cry of "*prensa vendida*!" [mercenary press] rang out through the city streets, encapsulating the fury people felt for the largely corrupt press. The PRI—nicknamed "The Invincible" for having by fair means or foul won every election since it was founded in 1929 as the National Revolutionary Party—thrust its roots deep into a rotten ground that spawned, among other things, a docile press.

To start with, the government controlled all supplies of newsprint. Newspapers were allowed to pay for it later, and in some cases were never asked to pay at all. The same went for their employees' social security contributions. Some companies were exempted from taxes. Most newspapers and magazines depended on advertising from the state. Politicians and public officials bribed journalists and editors as a matter of routine, handing over so much cash (called *embutes* or *chayotes* in the journalistic argot) that many depended more on these payments than on their own salaries. As for news, the press—with a few exceptions—simply fed at the trough of information that the government had decided to make public.

The slavishness of the media was especially visible in its attitude to the president of the day. Under the Mexican system, the president had an almost divine status. As owner of the country's destiny, he was also regarded as master of its citizens' souls. ▶

He was the Untouchable. Though guaranteed in the national constitution, the freedom of the press was nevertheless treated by editors as a gift from this benevolent president, and thus an object for the deepest gratitude.

Exceptions to this miserable state of affairs played key roles in determining the later evolution of the press. In 1968, Julio Scherer García took over *Excélsior*, one of the country's biggest newspapers. He soon turned it into the most influential one, and it became recognized as one of the world's 10 best newspapers. Faced with its systematic criticism and attacks, the tyrannical government reacted in the manner it knew best. In 1976, the government of Luis Echeverria organized and funded a palace coup inside the paper, and Scherer García was forced out.

He and a team of reporters then founded the weekly magazine *Proceso*, which has been the bastion of the oppostion press ever since it first appeared on November 6, 1976. Following its example, some sectors of the traditional press made timid attempts over the next 20 years to break their bad habit of depending on the government. New papers sprang up, with diffcrent aims and strategies, but in general the corrupt rules of the game were preserved until January 1, 1994, the day President Salinas launched what he saw as the glittering triumph for his economic policy: the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) between Mexico, the United States and Canada.

From then on, criticism of the government became routine. The monolithic political system began to show cracks which some of the media ventured into, more often drawn by instinct than a high degree of professionalism and responsibility. Ernesto Zedillo, who took over from Salinas de Gortari, could not and did not want to curb the mounting backlash against the PRI system. Either through indifference or scorn, the press was let off the leash.

Many papers were confused. They didn't want to stop acting like poodles, but they sensed that a change of master was imminent. By the time of the 2000 presidential elections, an unfettered press was in place. The leading candidates were the PRI's Francisco Labastida and a rising political star called Vicente Fox, officially standing for the right-wing National Action Party, but who was launched into the race by a solid group of independent businesspeople, marketing experts and some social organizations unconnected to political party machines.

In fact, Mexicans were ready to dump the PRI, and on July 2, 2000, Fox beat Labastida by a landslide; 71 years of history ended without a hint of violence. But did a period of transition then begin? Perhaps, but perhaps not. The more sceptical argue that Fox is not the statesman needed to preside over a genuine national transition. Others rightly note that the keystones of Mexico's oligarchic power structure are still untouched. Whatever the truth of the matter, the press has played a major part in the political change. It helped demystify the regime and above all show that the president was no longer the Untouchable, and the PRI no longer the Invincible.

Many papers didn't want to stop acting like poodles, but they sensed a change of master was imminent

So what comes next? In its special issue on Fox's election, *Proceso* summed up the challenge now facing the country and the press. The cover shows supporters of Fox carrying a coffin painted in the PRI's colours with the words "And now what?" written above it.

A year later, the question remains. The Mexican press is operating in an ill-defined context. It has replaced its old docility with persistent opposition, helped bring about the change in power and is now wondering what side of the fence it can or should be on—criticizing the new government or generously giving it the benefit of the doubt.

Is the press truly ready to be part of a genuine transition? I am not optimistic. Mexico has a high birth rate as far as the press is concerned—every week a new publication seems to hit the streets—but there are very few readers. After last year's election fever, with unemployment now on the rise and purchasing power in decline, readers are drifting away. Without state subsidies, small or family-owned papers and those stuck to the ways of the past are disappearing.

The challenge is how to adapt to the new situation. In Fox's pragmatic world there is only room for the strongest and, it would appear, for the business-minded. In Mexico, the information industry could well draw foreign investors, especially now that the doors of our economy are not just open but have disappeared altogether.

It remains to be seen how much press criticism Fox's government, which is itself a child of the opposition, is prepared to tolerate. New governments tend to be oversensitive toward the press. We shall have to wait and see. ■

SIGLO VEINTIUNO
Por una nación justa, digna y solidaria
Condenan golpe
OCUPACION MILITAR
Censored! The Guatemalan newspape

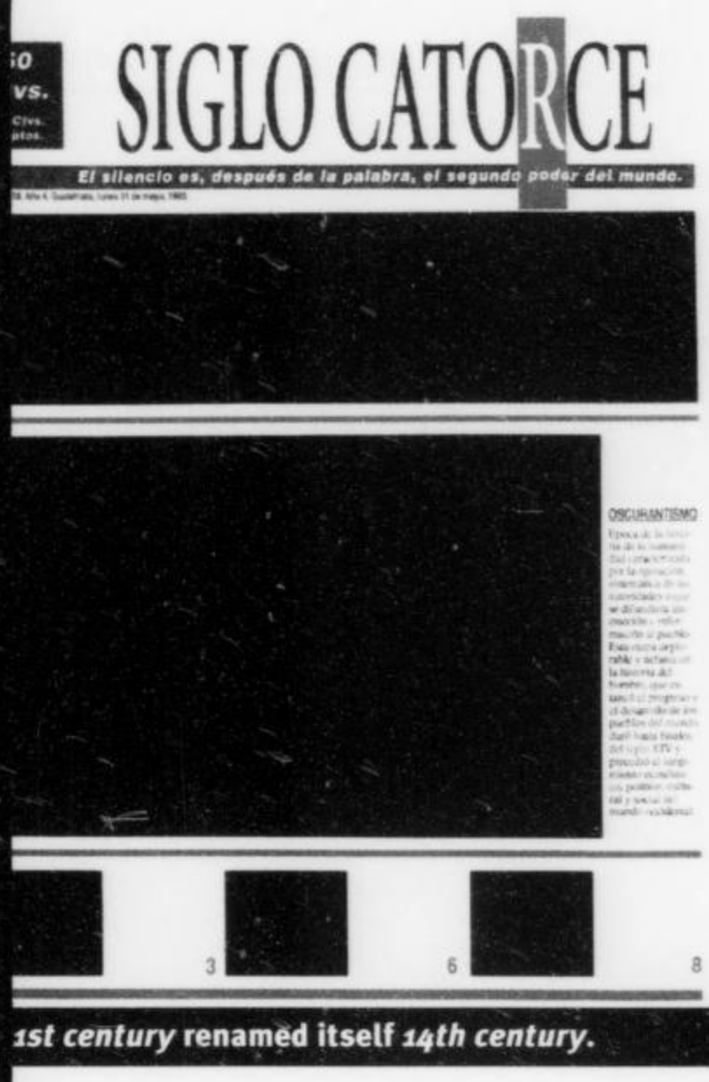
Mexico publishes 328 newspapers and 1,600 magazines. *Excélsior* has a daily circulation of 130,000.
Source: National Chamber of the Mexican Publishing Industry, 2001

Rise of a new watchdog in Latin America

Buoyed by the spread of democracy, Latin America's press is fast gaining in influence, boldness and credibility, says journalism professor Mario Diament[1]. The technology revolution stands to make the process irreversible

INTERVIEW BY LOUISE CORRADINI

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST


SIGLO CATORCE

El silencio es, después de la palabra, el segundo poder del mundo.

OSCURANTISMO

© Siglo Veintiuno, Guatemala

21st century renamed itself *14th century.*

Latin America has been through quite a few profound political transitions over the past two decades. What part has the press played in this process? Is there a kind of regional model that defines its relationship with political power?

You can't really talk about a "regional model," but of similar experiences. According to conventional wisdom, the more democracy you have, the more press freedom there is, but this still varies from one country to the next. In the past, a sizeable part of the Latin American press had close ties to political and economic interests through its owners. Those interests routinely took precedence over journalistic impartiality. But during the 1970s, journalists became very politicized. Many became subversive and partisan writers, distorting the role of the press and badly undermining its credibility. However in the 1980s, as democracy spread across the region and a new generation of journalists less marked by past events came to the fore, a very refreshing and positive change took place.

Can you give a few examples?

Mexico and Guatemala are two of the most interesting cases. The Chiapas uprising in Mexico had the effect of cutting short press allegiance to the ruling party, the PRI, which went hand-in-hand with rampant corruption. Chiapas came on so suddenly that the government of President Carlos Salinas didn't have time to put together a media strategy to deal with the situation. As a result, part of the Mexican press began reporting very openly on events. I think it's safe to say that to a large extent, this new attitude on the part of the press sounded the death knell of one-party domination and opened the way for Vicente Fox's victory in the presidential elections in 2000.

In Guatemala, during the short-lived seizure of full powers by President Jorge Serrano on May 25,1993, censorship was imposed and the press defied the government for the first time. The newspaper *Siglo Veintiuno* (21st Century) renamed itself *Siglo Catorce* (14th Century) and ran black columns in the place of censored material, exposing the government's attempt to stop the press from reporting on events. Colombia should also be mentioned: many journalists have and continue to risk their lives there reporting amid threats from guerrilla forces, paramilitary groups and druglords.

In the past, the Latin American press has often been submissive and engaged in self-censorship, sometimes to the point of complicity with the powers in place. Why has this changed?

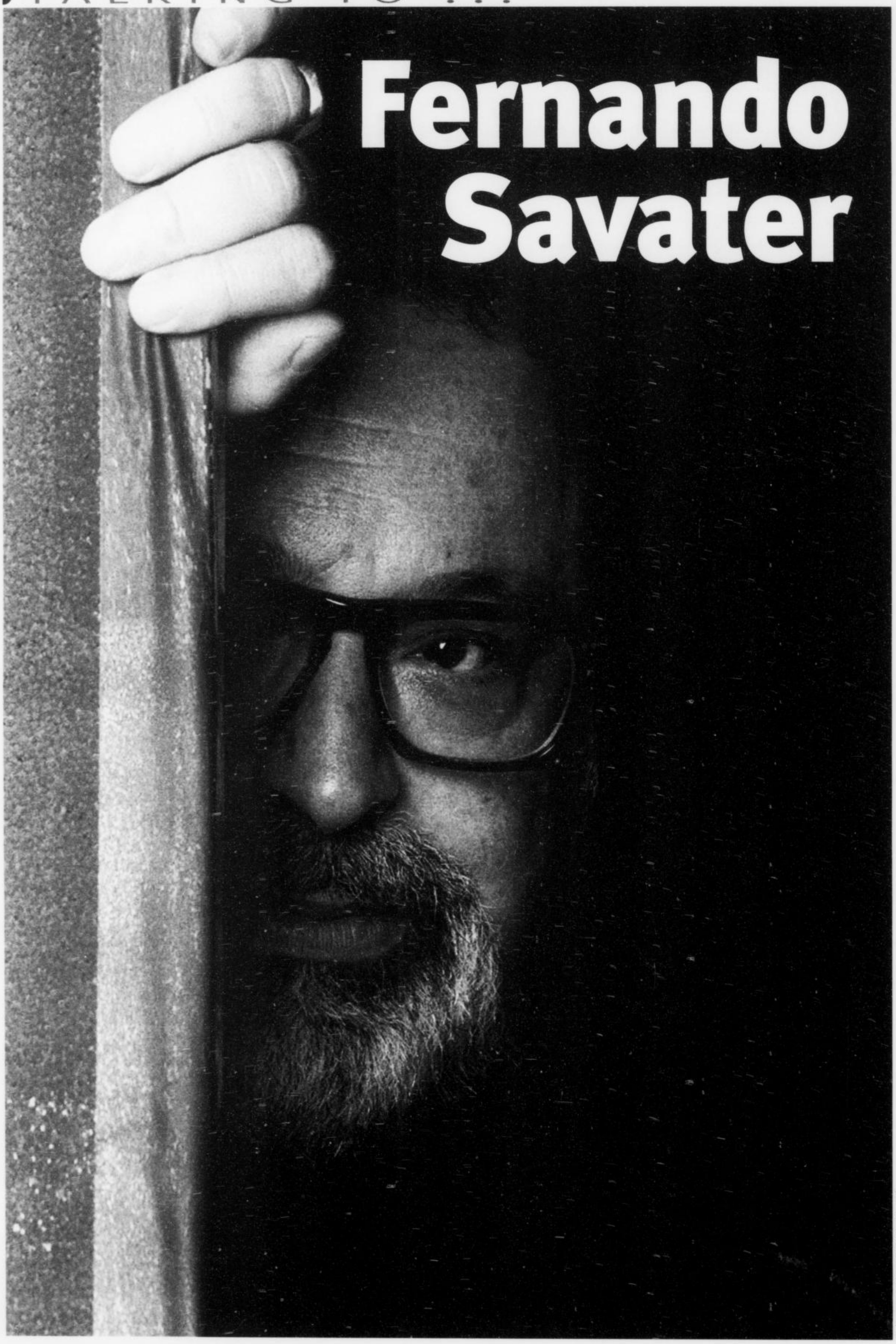
In my eyes, the two most important factors are the return to democracy and the revolution in technology. The South American dictatorships of the 1970s created a spineless and obliging press, but as these regimes began to crumble, the media became more independent. With the return to democracy, journalists became even more daring and inquisitive.

In some places, such as Argentina, the press' credibility and influence grew as political parties became discredited. During the 1989-99 rule of President Carlos Menem, the Argentine press published a remarkable series of investigations into corruption and money-laundering that shook the government. At one point, opinion polls showed that the public trusted the press more than any other institution in the country, including the Catholic Church.

The revolution in technology, which began with photocopies and faxes and moved onto satellite TV and the Internet, has diversified information sources to the point that nobody can seriously hope to impose any kind of control. The relative cheapness of the technology has made the spread of information more democratic than ever before. ■

1. *An Argentine journalist and playwright living in Miami, where he is professor of journalism at Florida International University.*

Fernando Savater



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The hostage of purity

Differences aren't necessarily a good thing, says Basque philosopher Fernando Savater. Threatened with death for his opposition to armed struggle, he practises his own brand of "active pessimism," fighting weapons with words

You're a philosopher, writer and university professor. Despite your many activities and over 45 books that you've written, it seems people only want to hear your views on the Basque conflict. Does that upset you?

It's a little tedious and one-dimensional because one does many things in one's life, maybe too many, though the only thing that interests people is the fact that one day you stood at a corner with a placard. But in the end it's just one of those problems. Nobody's required to be interested in philosophy, but I think you should be interested in your own country. I've got no desire to draw attention to myself. I just want to use the audience I can attract to promote something that seems vital to me—defending the rule of law and fighting totalitarianism in my country.

It must be terrible to be unable to move without bodyguards.

The other day someone asked me with the best intentions what I felt about that, and in response I asked: what do *you* feel like when you see a large number of your fellow citizens—journalists, teachers, town councillors, housewives—having to live with bodyguards? Why should someone with bodyguards have a psychological problem, but not the person who sees him or her passing by with a police escort? People should be asked how we can talk about European unity when there's suddenly a part of the continent where people can't walk freely down the street.

The *Basta Ya* (Enough is enough) movement that you're the spokesman for has just been awarded the Sakharov Prize for human rights by the European Parliament. Can you tell us about *Basta Ya*?

It's another of the many recent attempts in the Basque country to denounce and oppose violence. Perhaps what makes this one special is that we've taken to the streets not just to say what we don't want—violence, crime and killings—but also to say what we do want, namely autonomy and constitutional rule. In other words, we think Spain's rule of law is better than what the Basque separatists are calling for. This rule of law can of course change and evolve, but not by force.

In the quarter-century since the death of General Franco, the Basque country, like other regions of Spain, has won increasing autonomy, yet ETA terrorism has killed more than 800 people. Why is there such violence?

The violence is fed by an ethnic-totalitarian ideology that has developed over time, probably incorporating elements from the past, from the Franco era, but which has festered and turned into quite an unusual threat inside Europe, because I really can't see how such extremes can now be justified.

What's happening in the Basque country is unheard of. Violence is not justified but in some places there are genuine political and economic inequalities and clear violations of human rights that explain why it breaks out. This is not the case in the Basque country.

What other places are you thinking of?

Colombia, for example, is an extremely unjust country, with vast economic and educational inequalities. I certainly don't think the guerrillas there represent a liberation movement, but you can understand why people take up arms. The same goes for El Salvador, Guatemala and Ireland, where the Catholics have been discriminated against and marginalized to the advantage of Protestant unionists. And of course, there's Palestine and the Middle East. Without going as far as saying armed struggle is a good thing, you can understand why people resort to violence in some places.

Why do you think the Basque struggle is different?

People in the Basque country have the same freedoms as any other people in Europe. There's more political and economic self-government than in the German *länder*, and it has its own parliament with all political parties represented, including the separatists. It's a developed area with no economic problems. The main Basque problem is that there isn't one—there's no objective, historical or economic basis for one. And ETA's ideas, or to put it bluntly, the ideas of Basque nationalism, wouldn't be taken seriously were it not for the violence. Just as they aren't taken seriously in France.

Why is that?

For two reasons. The first, as the French ought to know or recall, is that the French Basque nationalists were discredited by their collaboration with the Nazis. Hitler began trying to expand his rule throughout Europe by preaching freedom, autonomy and self-determination for Europe's ethnic minorities. Many minorities collaborated with the Nazis because they thought that if Hitler destroyed France, for example, he would give the Basques special status, and if he conquered England, he would free the Irish. The fall of Hitler at the end of the Second World War silenced the French Basque nationalists for quite a long time. Secondly, we must not forget that ultra-nationalist positions are hard to reconcile with a citizens' Europe. If they hadn't used violence, who would have given them the time of day? In a free and prosperous country, where the local language and human rights are respected, ▶

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"I don't believe that it's legitimate to replace a civic democracy with an ethnic democracy"

who is really going to be interested in setting up a state that has never existed before?

What would you say to those who back the ETA, at least in terms of its broad goals, on the grounds that armed struggle is the only way to gain independence?

Well it's obviously the only way they've got to gain independence since they're a minority in a society that doesn't want it. The ETA is as legitimate as a group of armed bank robbers who, because they don't have any money in the bank and the manager isn't going to give them any, force their way in at gunpoint to get what they want. Both the methods and the very ideology of ETA are illegitimate. I don't believe that it's legitimate to replace a civic democracy with an ethnic democracy. Creating a state can be a political project because states are made through agreements, but it is not a right, nor is it a duty, that people should be interested or excited about a political programme advocated by those whose ideology, methods and ideas—half racist, half radical Marxism—are not shared by the rest of the population.

Some say the Basques suffered more than other Spaniards during Franco's regime.

That's pure myth. Franco didn't have many Catalan ministers, but he did have lots of Basques in his cabinet. He also spent summers peacefully in a yacht off San Sebastían's La Concha beach, something Prime Minister José María Aznar obviously couldn't do today. The Falangist anthem, the *Cara al Sol* (Face to the Sun), was composed by a Basque. Of course, Basques were oppressed, persecuted and wounded like all other Spaniards. The Basque language was marginalized, though not as much as people said because there were still conferences and classes in Euskara. But the Basques suffered so little that their provinces had the highest per capita incomes in the whole country. When Franco died in 1975, Guipúzcoa had the highest and Vizcaya ranked second. I think today they come 13th and 14th. So it's a myth that the Basques suffered more than other Spaniards. Most Basques—and of course most of those who became nationalists only after Franco died, since until then they'd been his supporters—benefited from Franco's regime at the expense of other Spaniards.

Some historians are surprised that Spain made no effort to commemorate the past during the transition period. Franco died, and the next day there was a constitutional monarchy. Don't Spaniards want to remember?

The vast majority of Spanish society tried to look the other way during Franco's rule, especially in the final years. People told themselves: "Don't get too mixed up in the details—let the guy die naturally, he doesn't have much longer to go." In the Basque country, the process of remembering was more of an agreement to forget: "I'll forget what you've done and you forget what I've done." In 1978 there was a general amnesty in the Basque country for every kind of crime, an

THINKING UNDER SURVEILLANCE

He's been called Spain's Jean-Paul Sartre and compared to Salman Rushdie. They also say he's a hero, though he hates that. He's just a concerned citizen with an interest in nationalism, for simple reasons of self-defence.

Fernando Savater, born in San Sebastián in 1947, studied philosophy and literature in Madrid, where he began his career as an assistant lecturer at the Autonomous University. But after a brief spell in Franco's jails, he was expelled from the teaching profession in 1971 for political reasons. In 1975, he earned his doctorate with a thesis on Nietzsche and shortly afterwards returned to teaching, this time ethics at the University of the Basque Country. He has been teaching philosophy since 1995 at the University of Alcalá de Henares, in Madrid, "although this year I haven't been able to teach my classes because I was advised not to for security reasons." Savater, who describes himself as "more a philosophy teacher than a philosopher," has written more than 45 works—essays, novels and children's books. His philosophical ideas, detailed in a personal philosophical dictionary (unpublished in English) are based on thoughtful rebellion against the establishment, with a touch of humour and irony.

His speciality is ethics, which he defines as "the belief that not everything is equally valuable and that there are reasons for choosing one course of action over another." He has written several books on the subject, including *The Task of the Hero* (1982), which won the Spanish National Essay Prize that year, *The Questions of Life: Invitation to Philosophy* (1982), *Ethics as Self-Respect* (1988) and *Ethics for Amador* (1991), which has been translated into 18 languages.

In 1997, he published *The Value of Education*, an essay dedicated to his mother, who was his first teacher, in which he professes that education is the cure for most of society's ills. "Intolerance, fundamentalism and extreme nationalism must be tackled from schooldays on," he says. In January 2001, he published an anthology of his many articles criticizing extreme nationalism that had been published in the Spanish daily *El País* and the Bilbao daily *El Correo*. It is the catalogue of an unarmed battle against weapons, an indictment of civil society for its passivity towards terrorist violence and a call to citizens to stand up to the ETA.

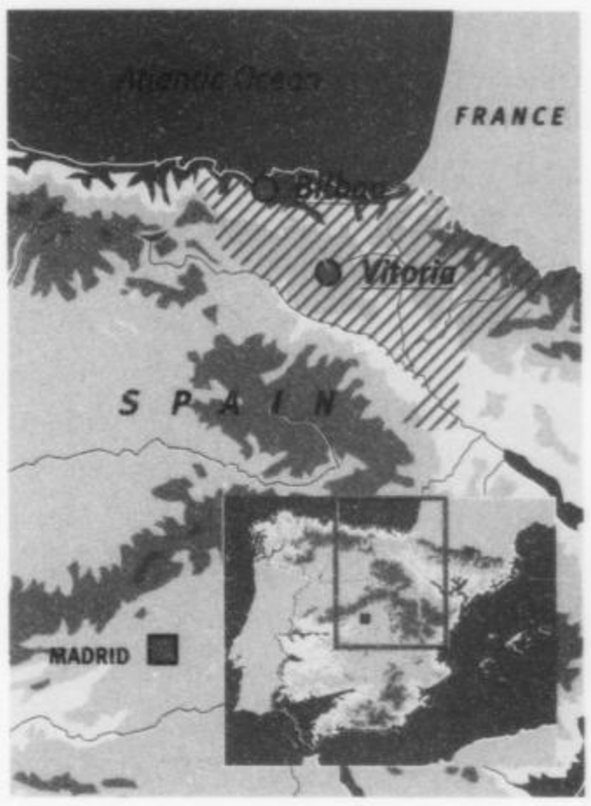
A horse-racing fan, Savater has visited the world's main racecourses. His latest book, "Astride the Millennium" (2001, yet untranslated) is a collection of articles about horse-racing.

As well as the Sakharov Prize for human rights that he received in December 2000 on behalf of the civic movement *Basta Ya*, for which he is the spokesman, Savater has won the Anagrama Prize, the Ortega y Gasset Journalism Prize (2000) and the Fernando Abril Martorell Prize for "his contribution to the defence and promotion of freedom, tolerance and human rights."

The ETA has been threatening to kill him for several years now. He lives in San Sebastián and Madrid with his bodyguards, from whose "friendly protection" he would be delighted to be "released as soon as possible." ■

THE BASQUE COUNTRY: 33 YEARS OF CONFLICT

The Basque country (Euskadi) is one of Spain's 17 autonomous regions. Since 1979, it has had two official languages, Spanish and Euskera, and since elections in 1980, its own parliament. The autonomous Basque government is responsible for education, health and taxation and has more powers than any other regional body in Europe.
The ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, or Basque Fatherland and Freedom) is calling for independence for Euskal Herria, an area between the Ebro and Adour rivers that includes Navarre, the Spanish Basque country and two departments of southwest France.
The organization, founded by a group of students in 1959, carried out its first terrorist actions in 1968 and has since caused the death of more than 800 people, 90 percent of them after the advent of democracy in 1975.
For many years, the ETA's main targets were the police and the army, but in recent years, it has stepped up physical attacks on politicians and extended them to other sectors of society, such as university teachers and journalists.



Basque country

amnesty so global and absolute that its like had never been seen before in Europe. The excuse for not investigating officials from Franco's regime was that the Basque terrorists were not being investigated either. The ETA militant who had murdered was freed, as was the general or police chief who had committed other crimes.

Are there any minorities whose claims to self-determination are legitimate?

Self-determination is a political right and a historic achievement by certain communities who join together to form states. For historical reasons, the borders and area of modern Spain are not those of 1,000 years ago and may be different again in 1,000 years' time. The same goes for the United States or anywhere else. But that doesn't have anything to do with minorities. The world has about 200 countries and more than 5,000 languages, which means most countries contain many languages and ethnic groups.

People might think you are against minorities...

I'm not against them. We all belong to minorities that are caricatured by others—to groups of enthusiasts, interest groups or religions. I belong to the minority of people who love horse-racing, but anthropologists don't talk up for us and we're not represented at the United Nations. The world is full of such groups, and there's nothing wrong with that. What I'm against is people inventing identities for certain groups and fragmenting humanity even more, instead of seeking to bring the benefits of civilization to all. Especially when the identities feature the circumcision of women or other such outrages.

But isn't there a risk of uniformity?

I don't think we need to crave difference or be horrified by similarity. Being different is not good in itself. Some differences are valuable and enriching and increase the joy of human existence, but others are terrible ancestral leftovers best forgotten as soon as possible. So slavery is different to an employment contract, but an employment contract is better and it would be silly for the sake of diversity to have some people with work contracts and others as slaves. I would like the whole world to be educated, have social security and give protection to children, pregnant women and old people. It's a pity that the world is becoming more uniform only in ▶

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"Purity produces nothing. Virgins don't bear children"

commercial terms, with speculative capital rushing back and forth, and not in desirable things like education and the defence of human rights.

Do you regret globalization?

Unfortunately, despite another myth I hear a lot, I don't see the world moving towards equality for all—far from it. Differences between let's say Sweden and Rwanda are going to increase, not diminish. Yet some countries have such horrifying features that you would wish for a more uniform world in terms of respect for basic rights.

What should we be fighting for these days?

Creative ability. It's vital that we defend all possibilities for creation wherever they are. Conservation of some oddity because "it's always existed here"—when in fact it's a matter of four or five folklore experts, archaeologists or anthropologists conjuring up a historical identity that everyone then has to conform to—really doesn't help at all. So I'm not in the slightest worried about identity, which I'm not interested in at all, or defending pluralism, which I think is guaranteed because people will always be born different to each other.

What about cultural mixing?

The whole history of humanity is a constant process of mixing. The greatness of the human species is precisely that we're all a mixture of something. When the human race started in Africa, we were probably all black and identical, but bit by bit we became different, taking on various ethnicities, colours and sizes. Those multiple mixtures are the salt of the earth, and will be even more so in a century, when you'll be able to travel and circle the world in just a few hours, or communicate through a computer at the other end of the planet. In my opinion, everything pure—pure identity, pure ethnicity—seems sterile. Purity produces nothing. Virgins don't bear children.

You say education can also change things and describe it as "supreme anti-fatalism, the only way to free people from their fate." Please explain.

Societies where education plays no part are stratified societies, in which each group is supposed to follow in the footsteps of its ancestors or the minority they belong to. The peasant's son learns from his father how to till the fields, mothers exchange information about children and childbirth, and soldiers learn how to shoot arrows or ride horses because that is the destiny society has given them. Education, on the other hand, moulds open-minded humans who can fit any number of roles within society. Greece in the time of Pericles, for example, educated its citizens so that each could become whatever he wished, whereas there was no education in the Persian Empire because everyone was predestined to play a set role. In our modern-day society there's also a kind of fatalism condemning the child of a poor person always to be poor, and the child of an uneducated person always to be uneducated. Education, on the other hand, is a progressive force, powerful enough to bust that social fatalism and create something new. In open, mobile societies, the street-sweeper's child can become president or head of a university thanks to education.

In this reinvention of society through education, what parts do the family, the school and the pupils respectively play?

By education, I don't just mean its academic side, which is the easiest to measure, but is not the sole kind of learning. Although the family has evolved and is not the same as it was half a century ago, it still has a role in bringing respect and

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UMI

SHOULD READ ISSUE 7/8.

emotional intelligence into the world. The problem is that adults in today's families have, or say they have, little time to educate their children, often preferring to pay others to carry out this work. School education for its part acclimatizes children to a more egalitarian and abstract world that is not just about feelings, but also legal entitlements, which is an important step forward. The media of course educates people too, as do socially influential people such as performers and sports personalities. But in the end, it's the person, the pupil, the beginner who learns. The most us teachers can do is teach. Only the pupils can learn. What we have to do above all else is awaken the child's willingness to do so. As soon as that appears, he or she will find the best ways to move forward.

wanting a rest. If this is the case, then hope means saying: "we'll sort this out in the end, bit by bit, through life and time." I don't think space or time will sort out anything by themselves—that's why I'm an active pessimist. Things don't get settled on their own: the situation is very serious and utterly awful. Letting Europe know what's happening here, so that it takes responsibility or somehow helps those of us fighting fascism, could prove of use. The same people who rallied to help those threatened by totalitarianism in Kosovo and elsewhere need to take action here. When you do something you hope it turns out well, and in that sense it is optimistic because you think the situation might improve. But it isn't an automatic process. The problem isn't about getting national-

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Fernando Savater marching in a *Basta Ya* demonstration in San Sebastián.

Your books *Ethics for Amador* and *Politics for Amador* were attempts to explain to your son Amador and other children, the bases of those subjects. Do you think children are really interested in that?

I've never met a young person who isn't. Most aren't interested in learning such things from their teachers, but in all my 30 years in education, I've never met kids of 15 or 16 who weren't interested in freedom, beauty, justice and death. But I have certainly known adults busy making money and doing other things they believe are important who've stopped being concerned by these things.

At the risk of boring you, I would like to finish by asking if you're hopeful about a solution to the Basque crisis.

There is a *milonga* [a popular Argentine song] which says hope often means

ists and constitutionalists to reach agreement—it's nothing to do with that. Are we going to change the way we educate our children? Are we going to change the propaganda on television? Are we going to change the systematic instilling of hatred in the Basque country for everything connected with Spain or the Spaniards, who make up more than half the population living here? Are we going to change that? Is there some law that can be passed to change that? We have to keep on struggling.

Are you going to continue?

I'm going to try, if I'm allowed to.

INTERVIEW BY
LUCÍA IGLESIAS KUNTZ

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